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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY
REV. EDWARD HASTINGS, M.A.

JOINT EDITOR OF 'THE EXPOSITORY TIMES'

FOUNDED BY
JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF
'THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE'
'THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS'
AND OTHER WORKS

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH
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The aim of THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE is to preserve all that is worth preserving of the modern interpretation of the Bible. It is the thought rather than the expression that is retained, though the expression has not been rejected when it seemed worthy. So much, however, has been done in the way of condensing, re-arranging, re-writing, adding to, and illustrating, that the sources have not as a rule been given. But so far as these are published sermons, they will be found in the Index to Modern Sermons which accompanies each volume. THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE contains also much that is new, written by the Editor and others.

THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

THE GOSPEL OF COMFORT

Isaiah xl. 1.—‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.’

THESE beautiful words strike the keynote of the second part of the Book of Isaiah. The prophecies of the first part are rounded off by four chapters of historical narrative which indicate in a very marked way the division of the Book, and when the prophetic voice is heard again we are at once made to realize that the scene has changed. No longer does the Holy City stand secure, as in Isaiah's day, while the daughter of Zion laughs her enemies to scorn. The prophet speaks to a people who have long been in exile and to whom he holds out the hope of restoration and return. It used to be supposed that these prophecies came from Isaiah, who by the aid of inspiration was enabled to project his spirit into the far future and lay up a message suitable for the time of the Exile. This, though conceivable, would have been most unnatural and wholly unlike anything else in Scripture. Accordingly it is now agreed that we have here the message of a great unknown prophet of the Exile, who lived among the people to whom he spoke. The fact that his prophecy has been appended to that of Isaiah, will present no difficulty to anyone who realizes the circumstances under which ancient books were transcribed and preserved, and who remembers that in the Hebrew Bible the Minor Prophets are united in a single book, the Book of the Twelve.

The prophecy is anonymous like so much else in the Old Testament, but the value of its message does not depend on the solution of critical questions. It suddenly breaks forth without introduction or warning, a heavenly voice clear and sweet as the bugle note that wakes the dawn. ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.’ It is a rousing call, for ‘comfort,’ it should be remembered, does not mean simply to soothe, but, as the word itself signifies, to make strong, to invigorate. It is in the truest sense a gospel, and this

prophet has justly been called the Evangelist of the Old Testament.

Dr Stoughton was wont to say to his students, ‘Gentlemen, when you are uncertain, as you will often be, on what subject to preach, you cannot be wrong in following the line indicated by the prophet's cry, “Comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably.” For the truest ministry is the ministry of comfort. You are not ordained to give good advice, but to preach glad tidings.’ A wise counsel and one to be remembered by all preachers! For the gospel is above all else a message of comfort, a declaration of the kindness and love of God our Saviour. As Jesus Himself said, quoting from this prophet, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.’ And He added, ‘This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.’ Alas that this gospel of comfort should by many be so grievously misconceived. To their eyes, viewing it from without, it appears as a stern law, dark with threatenings of judgment. Even so did the pillar of fire appear to the Egyptians by the Red Sea, when it came between them and the camp of Israel. To them it was a cloud and darkness, but it gave light by night to the people of God. When viewed aright the gospel is God's pillar of fire to guide His people through the world's dark night. And the main business of prophet and preacher is to point benighted souls to that heavenly light, and to comfort, to encourage, to invigorate all who are fain to follow it.

1. Consider first *the need of comfort*. Israel's need was very obvious in the prophet's time.

The people had long been in exile in a heathen land, their Holy City a desolation. A generation had grown up whose hearts were sick with hope deferred. No faintest gleam was in their sky. No power on earth seemed strong enough to break their yoke and let the oppressed go free. They knew that all this had come upon them for their nation's sins, but that only made their case the more hopeless. They acknowledged God's justice in all that had befallen them. They were but eating the bitter fruit of their ways. 'The fathers,' they said, 'have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' As the prophet Ezekiel, himself a victim of the Exile, pictured it, the whole house of Israel was like nothing but a valley full of dead men's bones, scattered and dry. So utterly had life and hope gone out of them. The feeling in many minds was that God had forgotten them. It cannot have been easy for a people who had been brought up to think of their God as dwelling in Zion and having a special oversight of the land of Israel, to rise to the grander thought that God was equally near to them in Babylon. In that mighty city, with its imposing temples and its surging crowds of heathen, they felt utterly forlorn. Zion and Zion's God seemed very far away, and their ancestral faith inadequate and futile.

In such circumstances, to a lost and broken-hearted people who had sinned and suffered so grievously, the supreme need was of comfort. There had been times in Israel's history when prophets were needed to brave the wrath of kings and bring down the mighty from their seats, to denounce judgment upon the nation's sin and woe to them that were at ease in Zion. But these days were past. There needed now no Elijah to call down fire from heaven, but on the contrary, some Son of Consolation with a healing word to bind up the broken-hearted and to comfort all who mourned. And so this prophet came.

Man's deepest need is ever the same, the need of comfort. Many, doubtless, are careless and unconscious in the meantime of their need; that does not make their need the less nor safeguard them against the oncoming of their evil day. To everyone sooner or later the struggle comes, and life puts human endurance to the test. We judge wrongly when we judge harshly. For, after all, the world is not full of proud people who need to be broken and

humbled, but rather of weak who need to be strengthened, of burdened needing to be eased, of downcast needing to be comforted.

Especially is this true of our own time. Besides all the common ills that flesh is heir to, this generation of ours finds itself confronted with special anxieties and troubles. It is not necessary to rehearse these for everyone feels the pressure of them, the world-wide distress, the social unrest, the jealousies of nations, the awful fear of war, the whole future dark and uncertain in the extreme. In addition to that a revolution has taken place in the world of thought which has undermined the faith of many. By the discoveries of modern science the universe is now known to be immensely greater than was formerly supposed, and many are feeling that the old religion is inadequate. Like the exiles in Babylon they feel themselves lost and forlorn and far from God. Faith is oppressed and overwhelmed by the immensities of time and space. However little justification there may be for this feeling, there can be no doubt that it is widespread. Man is pictured as contemptibly insignificant, human life as transient and valueless. The light of hope fades from the sky and dark clouds of moral lassitude and pessimism gather overhead. Surely no age ever stood in more need of a message of comfort, some heavenly tonic to cheer and invigorate, some spark of Divine fire to rekindle faith and hope.

2. Consider, now, *the message of comfort* which this prophet was commissioned to bring. It was, in a word, the message of a Divine deliverance, to be brought about by human agency doubtless, but essentially the work of God. The King Himself was coming to deliver His people, and already the cry had risen of His near approach. Let all prepare to welcome Him, for now is the day of their salvation.

He comes with infinite power. No obstacle can stand in His way. Valleys shall be exalted, mountains and hills brought low, the crooked made straight and the rough places plain. Nothing can stay His victorious march and all the world shall see the glory of it. The prophet paints a wonderful picture of the infinite might of Israel's God, who holds the seas in the hollow of His hand, who counts the stars and comprehends the dust of the earth, who weighs the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance,

and before whom the nations are as a drop in a bucket. The gods of the heathen are, by comparison, local, lifeless, helpless, but Jehovah is omnipotent to save. This splendid outburst is directed against the unbelief of those who said, 'God has forgotten us; in this great Babylon we are too distant and too insignificant to be remembered.' The prophet's message is that God is too great ever to forget. He who counts the stars and calls them all by name will never forget the name of the least of His people.

And He comes in infinite tenderness. To match the picture of the omnipotent Creator there is the companion picture of the tender Shepherd who shall take special care of the weak. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.' Thus He would bring them all home. Bitterly did Israel remember how they had been driven from home. There was no shepherd's rod and staff to comfort them then, but the lash of the brutal Assyrian to urge them forward, with no mercy for the weary and the faint. The long desert route, like the slave-traders' march to the coast, must have been strewn with the bones of those who had fallen out and been left to perish. Now they were to be led home by One who knew the frailty of their frame, who would make a pace to suit the feeblest, who would continually renew their strength, so that they would run and not be weary, and walk and not faint. Thus would the Shepherd of Israel bring His exiles home.

In all its essentials this is the Christian gospel, the gospel that has brought comfort to every generation of believing people and is sufficient also for our time. We preach, as the prophet did, that God is come to the world in Christ for the salvation of His people, and that He is 'full of pity joined with power.' His power was shown in all the mighty works which He wrought in the days of His flesh, in His mastery over the forces of Nature and over the bodies and souls of men. But above all, by His resurrection from the dead He was 'declared to be the Son of God with power.' 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth' is the declaration of the Risen Christ to His Church, made without qualification or restriction. The keys of death and hell are in His keeping, and so we have the surest ground for believing that 'He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God

through him.' We must rise to a more exalted conception of the Divine personality and power of our ever living Redeemer, such as is everywhere presented in the New Testament. Our modern thought of Him is all too humanistic, too exclusively historical and even critical. We need to realize what the apostles taught, that the Risen Christ has a cosmical significance. When St Paul declared in the sublime confidence of his faith that 'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,' he had the whole universe in his view. Modern astronomy may add its millions upon millions of miles, but the figures, however impressive in themselves, are quite irrelevant from St Paul's point of view, and no one who has meditated, as he had done, on the meaning of the Infinite and the Eternal will be appalled by them. Whether the starry world be pictured as Ptolemy or Copernicus or Sir James Jeans has pictured it, Christ is the Lord of heaven and earth, able to subdue all things to Himself, able to save unto the uttermost. And, conjoined with His infinite power, is His infinite pity. He is the Good Shepherd who gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom, the Good Shepherd who giveth His life for the sheep. 'Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.' 'He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.' He has the tender sympathy that is born of experience. He has trodden the weary way Himself, and the marks of the wounds are in His hands and feet and side.

In every pang that rends the heart,
The Man of sorrows had a part;
He sympathises with our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief.

This is the gospel of comfort upon which we stay our souls. No lesser hope will serve, for nothing else is adequate to human need. As surely as the exiles of Israel could never have found deliverance from Babylon without the Divine intervention, so surely shall we and the world of our time never find salvation except by the mighty hand of God and in His mercy. If we place our hopes elsewhere we only invite disillusionment. Only one thing stands between

us and ultimate despair, and it is this. Omnipotent love is working for our salvation, and will not cease to work till every wound is healed, till every tear is dried, till every broken heart is comforted and every wrong made right.

3. But now, in conclusion, let it be noted that this comfort is expressly for the people of God. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye *my people*, saith your God.' We must not, with easy optimism, give the world a general assurance that all is well. We must beware of falling into the condemnation of the false prophets who say 'peace, peace, when there is no peace.' We dare not hide from ourselves that there are those 'whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web.' Not for them is this prophetic word. It is a particular message to God's own people who look to Him for their salvation. 'All things work together for good,' we sometimes inaccurately quote. But the Apostle says, 'All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' Only as we are in Christ do we have the right to take this Divine word of comfort to ourselves and stay our souls upon it. But if our hope does truly rest on Him, what comfort such heavenly hope can bring! Our God has not forgotten us, and He never will. He who counts the stars counts also the very hairs of our head. Omnipotent love is at work for our salvation, and will prevail. However dark our night may be the eternal day will dawn. 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' And when we have taken this comfort to our own hearts it surely becomes a sacred duty to re-echo the prophet's word, to make known to others this Divine message, so that they also may be led to build their hopes on a sure foundation. Ours is a gospel of comfort, the very gospel for a sinful and benighted world. It is not our part to criticize and judge, but it is our privilege in the spirit of Christ to bring this healing balm to wounded hearts. What more Christlike than to cheer the desponding, to lift the fallen, to guide the erring, to bring light to those that are in darkness, and encourage the weary to patience and hope. So shall we strengthen each other's hands in God, and brighten our homeward way, till at last we all come to the heavenly Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads.

J. H. MORRISON

The Church's Mission

Is. xl. 3.—'The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God' (R.V.).

So to Israel in exile, uplifted by an undying hope, yet stricken with impotence which could look for help to none but God, the clear voice rang out its urgent call of appeal and promise. So also, centuries after, on the banks of Jordan it spoke by the lips of John the son of Zacharias, announcing to the multitudes which thronged to hear him the coming of Christ. To the Babylonian exile it was a challenge to gird up his loins to welcome his redeeming God; and with a like demand it broke in upon the religious slumber of Jerusalem, as the Baptist called the spiritless Israel of his day to prepare to meet the Messiah. And now to-day, to those who have undertaken the high duties and responsibilities of the Christian ministry, it speaks once more its imperative summons—to make straight in their own time a highway in the desert, and to prepare in their modern wilderness the way of the Lord.

1. The ministry of God's Word and Sacraments to-day is a work which can be attempted only by men who know what it is to have received a real call from God. Ours is the high trust to serve the Church in a time when scope and room are afforded for a fellowship of service with the highest and best that has been wrought for God and His Christ in ages past. We live so closely in touch with our age, and are so much its product, that most of us cannot feel its real complexity, and do not discern the extraordinary changes which are taking place before our very eyes. Its social changes signify the rapid passing away of an old order, and a steady set in the world's life towards a new order from which has vanished much that for ages has been taken for granted as permanent and unchanging. Not only religion itself, but the very foundations of common morality are seriously imperilled by tendencies which are at work in all departments of our life. And, beyond the limits of European civilisation, old nations like China, Japan, and India are being altogether transformed under the pressure of education and contact with the stream of western influences which are pouring in upon

them; while new civilizations are swiftly being built up on the outskirts of our own Empire. If ever the voice rang clear to call men to prepare God's way in the desert, it rings out now for all who have ears to hear it!

For with all its boasted progress, its wealth, its power over Nature, its education, and its eager and expectant life, this is still the sinful and unsatisfied world for which Christ died. It has not outstripped Bethlehem, nor has it outgrown the need of the Cross. Among all its discoveries it has found out no new cure for its disease of sin, nor has it learned how to realise the purpose of its existence without the self-manifestation and redemption of God. It may build better houses and educate its poor, and furnish itself with all the material contrivances which make living easy and pleasant and swift and free; it remains a world of human spirits which are restless till they rest in Him who made them in the image of Himself. Struggle though it may to do without Him, it sadly returns upon itself from every expedition into selfishness with a cry for the Eternal Love. And still, as in every preceding age of its long and chequered story, it is waiting for the men who love, and think, and pray, waiting for the voices that will tell it the truth about itself, and prepare through the wilderness a highway for their God.

¶ George Borrow wandered into the fields of Wales and fell into conversation with a group of gypsies. He did not talk to them of religion, yet all unknowingly the virtue went out of him; so that when he made as if to go they besought him, saying: 'Oh, it was kind of you to come . . . that you might bring us God.' He made it clear that he was neither priest nor minister, but they entreated him the more; 'Oh, sir, do give us God.' Such is the agelong cry that the world lifts to its pulpits. If the preacher has kept the vigil of prayer, if he has made friends with the silence in which God speaks, that cry will be his joy; if not, it will be his inward doom. The preacher's best offering is the gift of God. For *that* men will still raise hungry hands even when our best social schemes have found fulfilment.¹

These are days when there is less and less room for an uninspired clergy without a sense of the dignity of their mission. In the general landslide of establishment and authority a

¹ G. A. Buttrick, *Jesus Came Preaching*.

merely ornamental ministry can find no foothold at all. If the Church has a message, the world will listen; but there is no place in twentieth-century society for the polite weaver of platitudes, who entrenches himself behind inherited shibboleths, which to the modern man are only the relics of a dead past. More than this, the minister whose faith is only a form or an inheritance will find it growingly difficult to maintain that faith in himself against the disintegrating forces of modern thought. Probably he will end by losing it altogether, if he does not rediscover in it God's eternal message to his own life, and through himself to the heart and life of his generation.

¶ In Mrs Oliphant's *Life of Principal Tulloch*, there is a very vivid record of the impression produced by a sermon of Spurgeon's on Tulloch and his travelling companion, Professor Ferrier, the Scottish metaphysician: 'We have just been to hear Spurgeon,' he writes, 'and have been both so much impressed that I wish to give you my impressions while they are fresh. As we came out we both confessed, "there is no doubt about *that*," and I was struck with Ferrier's remarkable expression, "I feel it would do me good to hear the like of that, it sat so close to reality." The sermon is about the most real thing I have come in contact with for a long time.' It was so, too, that Newman impressed his contemporaries: he preached so that he made you feel without doubt that the spiritual was the most real of worlds to him; he made you feel in time, in spite of yourself, that it was a real world with which you, too, had concern. And to nothing, perhaps, is a congregation to-day more sensitive, nothing does it detect more quickly, than the difference between reality and unreality. When Ian Maclaren began his ministry, his biographer remarks, people knew what to expect, and the minister said what was to be expected. But as time went on the atmospheric conditions changed, and now a minister must find truths which hold him if he is to hold the people.¹

2. If the Christian ministry is thus confronted to-day with great tasks, it is compassed about also with the great dangers which always attend them.

It has to be on its guard, first, against the temptation into which the poet Lowell felt that

¹ G. Jackson, *The Preacher and the Modern Mind*, 239.

the facile versifiers of his day were falling, the temptation to be

An empty rhymor

Who lies with idle elbow on the grass,
And fits his singing, like a cunning timer,
To all men's prides and fancies as they pass.

The minister is no longer met with the worldling's ridicule as in the days gone by, because there are, happily, now very few incentives 'to go into the Church' (to use a common and most meaningless phrase) for an easy living. But he is daily face to face with the subtle tendency to become a mere secular official, a municipal figure and not a minister of God. There will be scores to congratulate him upon his excellent social service for every one who will help him to remember that he is to tune his message to the passion music of Calvary. The Christian ministry, it is true, alike in its origin and in its history, is steeped in ideals of social service. But to us social reform is becoming almost as fashionable as once was a certain type of obsolete Churchmanship; and for Christ's ministering servant to divorce it from its true spiritual associations is to enter upon a degeneration which is as certain as it must be fatal to his true vocation.

¶ 'A Church that believes in the Incarnation,' writes Dr J. H. B. Masterman, 'is bound to claim for every child adequate education, physical, mental, and spiritual; the decencies of home life; green places in which to play; and reasonable security against standing all day idle, when schooldays are over, because no man hath hired him.'

I do not want the dispossessed to be content with their lot. There is a dissatisfaction at injustice which in my judgment is divine. I am myself identified with political ideals and ideas that are anathema to conservatively minded people, and I wish to see men of my profession in the van of every wise scheme for social betterment.

Yet I do not believe that the Church is called into the world for social reform, but to set an example within the world of how a Society can corporately express values that are expected of the individual Christian. I should wish the Church to become the Body of Christ in practice and not merely in phrase, in that it displays in its own life, as well as in the lives of its members, those spiritual values which no one can doubt

were the values which Christ not merely assigned to the Father-God, but lived out in His own person.¹

There is another danger to which we are specially prone, which arises, like that of which we have just spoken, from the increasing difficulties of our calling in the life of to-day. We have to fear a mood like Hamlet's, which weakly bewails that 'the times are out of joint,' and bitterly resents 'the spite that we were ever born to set them right.' A young minister plunged into his work in the midst of a modern city, where every day he will meet either vigorous denials of his faith, or, worse still, a preoccupation with other interests which will not stop to listen to his message, is tempted to play the coward as he thinks of a time when religion was accepted as part of the outfit of a complete gentleman and the decrees of the Church were as the laws of the king. He has come to his kingdom, but why for such a time as this? What a wilderness of thought! What a desert of problems! He can hardly make his voice heard at all amid the noise of the inhospitable world, which refuses everything that he is anxious to give it. What is he to make of a modernism which struggles still to see in its tattered Gospels Christ's unutterable smile after it has ruthlessly evicted from them the Divine-human face? Why the ebb and flow of opinion? Why this shaking of the heavens and the earth? How much more comfortable to live in a world where fundamentals were universally accepted, and the only work for the ministry would be to get them applied to experience!

3. It is under conditions like these, and with such temptations, that the minister has to do his work to-day. But if the background is dark and menacing, the glorious hopes and the magnificent promises of the ministry shine all the brighter. There are great and unspeakable rewards which come to the man who, in spite of all that threatens to daunt him, turns his face to the East and bravely performs his tasks. For the present, however, we are more concerned to affirm that it is an experience never to be forgotten in the life of the Christian minister when he begins to see something of the possibilities of his mission, by measuring them over against the magnitude of his diffi-

¹ H. R. L. Sheppard, *The Impatience of a Parson*, 113.

culties. That is the experience which brings forth true prophecy, and makes a man a voice which cries aloud for a way in the desert, and prepares through the wilderness a highway for God.

Prophecy! Though we need much to-day, there is nothing we need so much as a prophetic ministry. Not an order of self-satisfied dogmatists who ape infallibility, and skim over the surface of the burning, aching human problems with easy solutions which have nothing in them but the evidences of prejudice and pride. Not this, but men who have travelled far into the tangled forests of life, and, following still the kindly light that led them 'o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent,' have found that it has broadened into a vision of the face of God; men to whom the holy name of 'Father' is not a picturesque description of the unknowable Power behind creation, but the sacrament of an eternal heart, and the Son not a Greek ideal of Godhead, but the everlasting utterance of incarnate grace and truth, and the Spirit not an influence of unintelligible deity, but a Divine Life-giver and Comforter and Friend; men to whom atonement is the last best word of an infinite readiness and ability to save, and justification by faith as real and as deep an experience as the poignant tragedy of their own sin; men, in a word, who have been taught in the strong conviction of faith to cry with St John, 'We know and have believed the love.' If we could but attain to that clear vision it would transform the drudgery of a barren and ineffective service into the rich and potent ministry of the true prophet of God.

Makers of the Road

Is. xl. 3, 4.—'The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain' (R.V.).

THE expression used here is a figurative one. It alludes to a custom well known in ancient times. When an Eastern monarch desired to pay a visit to a distant part of his empire he sent heralds before him to announce his coming and to see that the roadways over which he was to pass were put in order. All obstacles had to

be removed, and rough places made smooth. In like manner the exiles were to open up a way for the return to them of their God, who would lead His redeemed people back again to Zion. Everyone, by a personal, moral, and spiritual reformation, by a return to the pure worship and service of God, could play the part of a roadmaker, creating the highway for God.

¶ Have you ever visualized Isaiah's simile, 'The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God'? I had thought, and I believe most people think, of some neglected and sandy waste, something like the Sahara, perhaps overgrown with scrub. But the force of the illustration becomes ten times stronger when you realize what the words desert and wilderness can mean in these Judean hills. The hyperbole is terrific; the voice echoing through savage defiles and vast spaces of immeasurable waste—unanswered, unheard: the making of a highway out of these blind paths and precipitous descents where there is scarcely foothold for a goat—the miracle of the conversion of this place to make the crooked straight and the rough places plain.¹

To the writers of the Gospels this vivid expression seems to have commended itself as peculiarly applicable to the Baptist. He came heralding the speedy advent of the Messiah, and his life and ministry were a preparation for the greater life and more potent ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. If any man's life and work could be considered set forth in that ancient prophecy it was his. He ideally embodies it and illustrates it.

1. The herald and hastener of a better and holier day must be distinguished by a *profound sense of the evil of the present*. The prophets saw with clear penetrating eyes the moral and spiritual degradation of the times. They speak of it fearlessly, and of the national evils that must issue from it—defeat, exile, the overthrow of their beautiful city. That is true of the prophetic band from first to last, from Elijah to John the Baptist. They pointed out the inevitable outcome of the evils they saw and demanded a return to a simpler and purer life. Elijah, with trumpet voice, cries: 'How long halt ye?' And John lifts up his voice in the desert and bids men 'flee from the wrath to

¹ D. Maxwell, *A Painter in Palestine*, 112.

come.' A profound sense of the sinfulness of sin, and of the wrath of God that abides perpetually upon it, distinguishes those who were the roadmakers of past ages. They see the mountains of injustice that need to be levelled, the valleys of vice to be filled in, the crookedness of social life, the inequalities that make existence a burden to many.

One of the fundamental necessities for the man who will hasten the day of the Lord is just this faculty of seeing things as they really are. He who deliberately closes his eyes to the evils of his day, or, seeing them, minimises their importance, or in thought disguises them by some euphonious phrase, will never prepare the way of the Lord. Too many of us live in an imaginary world—as different as possible from the world of stern fact. We never seem to come into contact with realities. Indeed, there is a certain resentment against those who drag evil into the light of day, or who thrust unpleasant or unwelcome facts before our eyes. Yet, we would admit that it is both wise and necessary for one who projects a road to know the nature and lie of the country through which he means to make it. Why not in social and Christian work? If the drink trade, impurity, gambling, bad housing, the war spirit, unjust social conditions, an un-Christian commercial system are real hindrances to the coming of Christ's Kingdom and reign, why do we not frankly recognize the facts, and face the task which *these* hindrances present? Is it not true that much Christian work is futile, and much Christian speech beside the mark, because our energies and speech are directed against imaginary opponents and obstacles, while we leave the real enemies and obstacles untouched and unchallenged? Not until we look open-eyed, fearlessly, into the life around us, and see for ourselves the things which hinder the coming of that Kingdom, shall we be likely to take up the role and discharge the function of a roadmaker.

¶ There is plenty to make us uneasy here at home without looking abroad. The surface of our society is decent and comely, but how much wickedness and corruption are hidden under the surface. Are we consenting parties to any abuses? If we come across any inequality, do we wish to denounce it, or do we simply say: 'Such is the way of the world'? Are we willing to risk our popularity, are we willing to make enemies, in

order to stop some wrong being done? It is no use to trust to legislation to cure our abuses. Many people suppose that men can be made moral by Act of Parliament. But they cannot. There is no machinery for constructing an honest community out of dishonest individuals, or a public-spirited community out of self-seeking individuals. As Herbert Spencer said: 'There is no political alchemy which can produce golden conduct out of leaden instincts.' The motive power must be individual, disinterested action.¹

2. The roadmaker is distinguished by *an unquenchable faith in the future*. He is an optimist because he is a man of faith. Lord Salisbury once said that 'optimism appeared to him to have become a very dangerous vice.' There *is* an optimism which is both foolish and unfounded. But if the optimist has first looked facts in the face, if he has estimated with some approach to accuracy the difficulties to be overcome, and then rises by sheer force of faith in God above all that contradicts his hope, his optimism is not a vice but a shining and beneficent virtue. Such was this prophet's. The immediate prospect was dark enough, threatening enough, yet his faith in the future was unquenched, and he speaks of a future in which the national life is rebuilt in words which still thrill the hearts of men, so full are they of glad certainty of the high destiny of his people.

So also with the Baptist. He is certain, despite the manifold moral and social evils that afflict his people, that the day of the Lord's anointed will be a glorious day—a day of great things; and he speaks of it and of Him whose shoe-latchet he is not worthy to unloose with an unbounded faith: 'He must increase; I must decrease.' John sees in his mind's eye his own figure retreating, whilst the One for whom he has made the road advances, looming large and ever larger as with swift and even tread He comes along the prepared way. The prophets may have their moments when faith is temporarily eclipsed. Elijah prays that he may die; John sends asking, 'Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?' But they are but moments of a life. The eclipse passes, the sun shines in its strength again. God's purpose, which the roadmaker seeks to realize, is sure, and out of that his faith in the

¹ W. R. Inge.

future springs, though the present be as dark as starless night.

¶ Three hundred and seventy years ago a young woman sat down in the Tower of London and wrote a letter immortal. The Lady Jane Grey she was, and to-morrow lays her head upon the block. A young, fresh, English beauty, with life and love before her. And something more: a grave and noble mind. And her letter is to the Protestant leaders of England. 'Fight manfully on,' this glorious creature writes, 'fight manfully on. Come life, come death, the loss of men is not the loss of the cause. The battle is God's. The victory is ours.'¹

3. The true roadmaker is distinguished by *his readiness to serve and to suffer*. If you want to see how inevitable both are, read John's life afresh in the light of this thought. The strenuous ministry, the scorning of delights, the living of laborious days, the tragic end—all emphasize the fact that the man who would by his life help the making of a highway along which the men of other days shall run must be content to serve and suffer. For the truth is, this work demands not only the clear eye, the unquenchable faith, but the heroic spirit and temper which can endure. No good cause but has exacted its toll of both from heroic hearts that have embraced it. We cannot point to any advance of God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, peace, without discerning that the road along which humanity travels has been cut and levelled, made straight and smooth, by the toils and sufferings of men who willingly gave their strength and blood.

¶ In those bitter days when Wilberforce was working for the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire, he was seeking to place on the conscience of England the inferno through which the slaves were forced to go in the middle passage across the Atlantic. Small vessels of one hundred to one hundred and fifty tons were crowded with three hundred to six hundred slaves. These wretches were huddled so close that it was impossible for a man to step between them, and they were below deck for days. In fine weather they were taken on deck and forced to dance in their chains for exercise.

Wilberforce persisted in his efforts for these

¹ A. Maclean, *High Country*, 218.

black chattels year after year in Parliament. In one fiery debate in the House he was attacked as a public nuisance. This great English reformer was going through the experience of the cross.¹

The city of God is built by human hands, and paths are made for the ways of God's going by human sacrifice and endurance. And so the prophets of the world, those who stand upon the heights and see the first shafts of light that are prophetic of the coming day, ever cry to the men in the low-lying valleys, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.' The burden is ours and the glory: we are called to the cross, but only as preliminary to the crown. God waits to come. And that surely is man's supreme glory—that his poor frail life, which seems to be girt with littleness and transitoriness, may be lifted to the high glory of a co-operator with God.

We shall not travel by the road we make ;

Ere day by day the sound of many feet
Is heard upon the stones that now we break

We shall be come to where the cross-roads
meet.

For us the heat by day, the cold by night,

The inch-slow progress and the heavy load,
And death at last to close the long grim fight

With man and beast and stone : for them the
road ;

For them the shade of trees that now we plant,

The safe, smooth journey and the certain
goal—

Yea, birthright in the land of covenant :

For us day-labour, travail of the soul.

And yet the road is ours as never theirs ;

Is not one gift on us alone bestowed ?

For us the joy of joys, O pioneers !

We shall not travel, but we make the road !²

¹ George Stewart, *The Crucifixion in our Street*, 23.

² Helen Friedlaender.

The Transient and the Abiding

Is. xl. 6-8.—'All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field : The grass withereth, the flower fadeth : because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it : surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth : but the word of our God shall stand for ever.'

A MYSTERIOUS superhuman voice puts this cry into the prophet's lips. It is as though the rush and lapse of time itself became audible, and spoke its message to the thoughtless and fleeting generations of men. There are hours in life, solemn and critical for each of us, when we are compelled to hear it—as when one year, or one century, passes into another, or when our dead pass from our side. The prophet's cry reverberates along the corridors of time from each generation and age to the next ; our vanished years and the centuries of history take up the echo. They proclaim to us with one voice the transience of all earthly things, the abiding worth and undecaying power of the word of the living God, and the safety and permanence alone of those hopes and interests of mankind which have their foundation and their warrant here. 'All flesh is grass'—brief and frail in duration as the green grass in an Eastern land ; and 'the goodness thereof'—its beauty and charm—more fleeting still, as the flower that withers while the grass is green !

Look at the fate of summer flowers,
Which blow at daybreak, droop ere evensong ;
And, grieved for their brief date, confess that
ours,
Measured by what we are and ought to be,
Measured by all that, trembling, we foresee,
Is not so long !

In contrast with human transience and decay, the prophet points to 'the Word of God.' That Word, he says, will 'stand for ever.' The Apostle Peter detaches this text from its historical setting and gives it a universal application. When he reminds Christians that they are born again and have a new life and a new standard of duty, he adds that this new birth has been effected, 'not by corruptible seed, but by incorruptible, by the Word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever.' And then he goes on to quote the passage with such variations

as apostles, conscious of their own inspiration, often felt at liberty to make when citing the Old Testament. 'All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away : but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And,' adds St Peter, as if to prevent the quotation from suggesting nothing but historical or antiquarian lessons to his readers, 'this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.'

1. The words of the herald are to be applied, in the first place, to *nations* ; but they may also be applied to *individual men*.

(1) The immediate purpose of the prophecy is to reassure the Exiles. There they were in Babylon, surrounded by the imposing fabric of a great Empire, crushed into silent submission by its power, awed, at times half-fascinated, by its splendour. It was to men whose eyes were resting on this scene of magnificence and power that the solemn words were spoken : 'All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.'

The vision of the prophets of Israel ranged far beyond the narrow boundaries of personal life. 'See,' said God to the shrinking Jeremiah, 'I have set thee over the kingdoms, to root out and pull down and destroy and throw down, and to build and plant.' Nothing is more astonishing than the way in which these feeble solitary men, belonging to a despised people, confronted the empires of their day and all that proud and ancient civilization. Nothing is more astonishing than the political language of their prophecies—unless it be the completeness of their fulfilment. Egypt, Tyre, Nineveh, Babylon—names famed then for everything venerable in antiquity, rich in commerce, terrible in war—where are they, what are they now ? They are just what these men foresaw and what we read in their pages, 'a habitation of dragons, a joy of wild asses' ; they have been, and are largely at the present time, among the most oppressed and impoverished and desolate regions of the earth. Because those great world-empires were built on violence and slavery, and were corrupted by vile idolatries ; therefore they were foredoomed, and one after another they fell into decrepitude and ruin.

(2) The text, however, in its more familiar application speaks to us of the fleeting and

unsubstantial tenure of human life. In the Ninetieth Psalm the writer describes the impression produced upon his mind by successive spectacles of mortality, as one after another dropped off of those who were not allowed to enter the promised land until with the exception of Caleb, Joshua, and himself, the whole generation had passed away. 'Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest Return, ye children of men,' that is, Thou makest one generation to pass away, and another to take its place. And the contrast between the generations of frail, perishing men, passing away one after another, and Him in whose sight a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past is as vividly present to his mind as to the mind of the prophet. The comparison of mortal men to the grass and to the flower is not confined to the words of the text. We have the original of such comparisons in this Ninetieth Psalm, in which we read, 'They are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth.' In the Hundred and Third Psalm the writer adopts the same comparison, placing in contrast the temporary continuance of man with the everlasting continuance of the mercy and of the righteousness of God.

¶ This comparison of humanity to the withering grass and the fading flower is a more striking one in an Eastern land than it is with us. We witness the annual growth and decay of the grass, the annual bloom and withering of the flower, but in the East there is another cause of decay and death—the hot wind of the desert, fatal to vegetation, under the influence of which the grass withers suddenly, the flower droops and dies. Just as abundant rain will in an Eastern land quickly and as if by magic change dryness and barrenness into verdure, so will the Sirocco quickly substitute death for life.

The brevity of human life is a world-old and a threadbare theme, yet one which each sudden death, each story of widespread disaster, brings home to us with a force and a freshness always new. It comes home to us almost as it must have done to those who first realized it. It recurs again and again, as we all know, in the whole cycle of human literature. The very image of the text is but the Eastern echo of the simple pathos with which Homer compares the passing generations to the leaves which the winds of autumn scatter on the earth.

¶ Marie Bashkirtseff, a Russian girl of splendid genius, 'with the ambition of a Cæsar,' her biographer writes, 'smouldering under her crop of red hair,' is dying at twenty-four with less faith than a pagan, and she writes in her journal: 'Oh, just to think that *we live but once*, and life is so short! When I think of it I am like one possessed, and my brain seethes with despair.'¹

Gather the tears, gather the mirth!

Neither will last, neither will last!

Old Year's death is Young Year's birth—

Life travels fast!²

2. 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.' There is that which is ever perishing, but there is also that which is imperishable. And they are here placed side by side in designed contrast. What then is this changeless word of God to which the prophet refers?

(1) In the first instance it is the Divine word of promise to Israel—the promise of the return from Babylon. The conquerors and oppressors of Israel would pass away. With this imperishable Word of God Israel may comfort herself in her captive hours. The time of Babylon's fall would be the time of Israel's liberty. The promise of deliverance rested on a Will more durable than all the power and glory of Babylon. Whatever present appearances might be; however great the might of Babylon; however few and feeble the heralds of the Divine Word; the one was human, and therefore transient, the other eternal because Divine.

(2) 'But the word of the Lord'—in St Peter's sense of the term as well as the prophet's—'endureth for ever.' The gospel has outlasted and vanquished all the 'glory of man' which has ever disputed its claims. Its theoretic perfection linked with dynamic strength sets it in victorious contrast to every other professed guide of life. And never more triumphantly than to-day. For the foes of the enduring Word are always contemporary, since its message is ageless.

Through all the storms which have spent their force in vain, the sacred Volume, in which the Evangel is set forth in prophecy, psalmody, and proclamation, stands unmoved as some great rock in mid-ocean. The waves dash them-

¹ G. G. Findlay, *The Things Above*, 240.

² Galsworthy, *Rhyme after Rain*.

selves furiously against it, only to be broken in spray upon its immovable front. Despite every detraction, the gospel still holds to its self-verifying way—comforting the anxious, strengthening the feeble, encouraging the downcast, inspiring the fearful, and saving the sinner. And in all this confounding its enemies. One of the Waldensian churches has as its seal an anvil and a number of broken hammers, with the motto

Hammer away, ye hostile hands !

Your hammers break : God's anvil stands !

This is well expressed. For the verdict of history attests the enduring Word as the Word of the Lord. And in days like the present, when history is being made, all kinds of men turn to its pages for what cannot be found elsewhere. This, and the fact that there they unfailingly realize the satisfactions for which their every instinct of soul cries out, is evidence enough of its entirely supernatural character. The final homage of this as of every preceding age will yet be paid to the only gospel by which men can worthily live and courageously die.

¶ Dr Griffith Thomas, in an address delivered in London in the year 1922, said : ' Suppose someone comes to me and says, " I have brought you the last book on botany." I reply, " Of course, you mean the latest book." " No," he says, " the last," and he adds that no other book will ever be written on botany. Well, I should try to be polite but, of course, I should not believe him. The last book on any science cannot be written. But here in the Bible we have not the latest, but the last, word on sin, on redemption, on holiness, on immortality, and this Book has been before the world for nearly two thousand years.'

The written Word outlives every foe, not by reason of its historical accuracy, its ethical perfection, its moral beauty, its philosophic reasonableness, or its human sympathy—though it has all these qualities. The secret of its enduring character is Christ Himself. For ' the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.' And still He lives in our midst. Every page of the sacred Scriptures glows with His continuous revelation of God. The undying message of the Divine Fatherhood is for all time incarnated in the Christ of the Word. And every experience of those who believe in God through Him bears emphatic

witness to the faithfulness and trustworthiness of the record. It belongs to every age alike. For Christ Himself is contemporary with mankind.

Over against the perplexing ' changes and chances of this mortal life ' Christ sets the revelation of the Father. His love is persistent in its search after the lost and erring child. His mercy forgives the wrong-doing of the penitent at unspeakable cost to Himself. His loving will makes all things work for good to them that trust Him. His faithfulness harmonizes all the harsh and discordant notes of their experience into a love-song. His Covenant is for life, and goes far out also beyond death and judgment. This is ' the Word of the Lord ' which ' endureth for ever.'

Behold your God

Is. xl. 9.—' Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God !'

WHEN we meditate on present-day Christianity, of which we ourselves form part, we may recognize that it often suffers not so much from a lack of zeal as from an error in emphasis and direction. To put the point quite bluntly, many earnest, religious people suffer themselves to be diverted and distracted from the chief end of religion—which must be nothing short of God Himself. We do not mean for a moment that such people have given up their belief and turned materialists. It is rather that they have somehow lost touch with the living Heart of all things. Religion does a great deal for them, but it fails to keep them in contact with the personal reality of God's love.

1. This spiritual failure may come about from various causes. Not a few very sincere believers suffer loss from a habit of undue introspection. Some temperaments are taken up with their own conceptions and experiences of Christian truth, instead of fixing their eyes on Him whose name is Faithful and True. Some men still miss their God in the business of discussing Him and defining Him. They analyze their own faith, they trust to their own convictions, instead of forgetting themselves in faith's living Object. Or they rely on some inward experience of redemption, in place of adoring Him who is their Redeemer ; whereas it is characteristic of the gospel that it points us away from our-

selves to One who is far above us and beyond us, One who does for us all that we ourselves can never do. Salvation comes from without; and the watchword of salvation is not 'Behold your creed, your theology, your experience,' but 'Behold your God.'

¶ When we take the Psalter and compare it with ordinary modern hymn-books, we become aware of one notable change. Quite beyond outward differences of structure and rhythm, there is what may be described as a difference of spiritual standpoint. The average modern hymn-writer is apt to think first and foremost about himself, his own inward condition and emotion. Whereas the Hebrew Psalmist looks away and forgets himself in adoration of the Most High. The Eternal God is his refuge, and the burden of his song. And he thinks of himself mainly as related to God. Thus, for instance, in Psalm xxxvii. we read: 'trust in the Lord,' 'delight thyself in the Lord,' 'commit thy way unto the Lord,' 'rest in the Lord'—each precept looking outward and upward. The only precept which looks inward warns us against so doing by a thrice-repeated injunction 'fret not thyself.' Why, the modern hymn-writer is fretting himself half his time. The tendency in question, however, is not confined to our hymn-books; it infects our prayers and our sermons. There are some good men who practically preach faith, instead of preaching Christ. There are Christians who spend their time in questioning about faith and hope and love, instead of actually believing and hoping and loving. But a bird does not learn to fly by thinking about its wings. When I see clearly, I am not conscious of the eyeball or the retina. And when I believe properly, I am conscious only of Him whom I have trusted: I cry 'O God, thou art my God.'¹

2. Again, there are Christians of another school who miss their path because they continually search the Bible for what it was never intended to contain. Some read it as an anthology of magnificent literature, some treat it like a primer of science, some even degrade it into an almanac of predictions. But the Bible fulfils a far more sacred and glorious function. In the words of one of our modern prophets, 'Holy Scripture is either the gradual unveiling of God, or it is nothing.' For it

forms our only record of those great redeeming and revealing acts wherein God has manifested His nature and His will to mankind. And the whole purpose of Scripture is to carry us, while we read, beyond the record into personal contact and fellowship with the Redeemer and Revealer. The New Testament unfolds the mystery of the Divine Incarnation and Passion, and cries, 'Behold your God—the God of Love in the Man of Sorrows, who bears away the sin of the world.' Here, and here alone are disclosed the secrets of eternity.

¶ Bonar somewhere regrets that his interest in the Bible was so largely intellectual rather than spiritual and devout; but many never get at all beyond the intellectual interest. They unfeignedly appreciate its histories, poetry, ethics, language, and its literature generally, yet fail to grasp the essential truth. Travellers familiar with the Chinese tell that they often seem incapable of looking *through* glass. Their eyes focus on the glass like a photographer's on the finder at the back of the camera, and they remain utterly unable to see what lies beyond. It is a common thing with many to be similarly afflicted in the study of revelation; their eyes, focussed on its wisdom and eloquence, do not discern the eternal things far off, and the King in His beauty.¹

¶ The Bible, as a means of attaining to the knowledge of the living God, is precious beyond all expression or conception; when made a substitute for that knowledge, it may become a greater deadener to the human spirit than all other books.²

3. 'Behold your God' ought to be the burden of theology. Theologians often obscure their sacred theme because they try to translate the relations of living personalities into the terms of an intellectual equation. They deal with the gospel as though it were a philosophy of truth, or a system of moral laws. They annotate the Sermon on the Mount, for example, as though they had never come within sight or sound of the Preacher; and then they seek to exhibit His words as a blending of various poetic ideas and spiritual axioms, most of which may be traced back to earlier sages. But the authority of the Sermon on the Mount lives on His lips who spake as never man spake. Christianity can never be reduced to a religion

¹ T. H. Darlow, *At Home in the Bible*, 190.

² W. L. Watkinson.

³ *Life of Kingsley*, i. 128.

of doctrines, articulated in terms of their content. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not any system of doctrines, or the belief in them. Faith that saves the soul is living personal trust in a living Person, who brings God to men and brings men to God.

¶ 'It seems to me,' said Principal Rainy once in the Assembly, 'that one of the great mistakes of some of our German friends in their theology is that they seem to imagine they can construe God. You cannot construe Him, you can only look up toward Him.'

4. In these days we are in the midst of a many-sided revival of institutional Christianity, a movement which brings us rich new blessings and also involves us in strange and subtle perils. Nothing is more common—or more cheap and shallow—than for men to pour contempt on the modern Church, to point scornfully at its timidity, its routine, its divisions, its failures. Yet the scattered fellowship of the faithful persists through human generations. The flock of the Eternal Shepherd survives, still bearing its own supernatural testimony. So long as the Church produces saints—as it certainly does—so long as the love of Christ appears manifestly working in Christian lives and characters, the Church is indestructible. Nevertheless, there always remains a danger that we should exalt the formal side of Christianity at the expense of those living, personal relationships—Divine and human—which religious institutions and ceremonies and creeds have been developed to nourish and foster, but which they often stifle and bury out of sight. We dare never forget that our Lord transcends His visible Church. He is not imprisoned within its limits, or enslaved by its decrees, or fettered by its rules and ritual. And therefore, like the Bible, the Church cannot possibly be an end in itself. It exists that it may bear witness to Him who is the First and the Last and the Living One—Himself the Defender of its faith, the Director of its mission, the Author and Sustainer of its life.

Preachers of the gospel preach amiss unless they realize that the Lord whom they declare can declare Himself without their aid, and that, if it were not so, He would be no Lord at all. If they should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. For He is able out of the very stones to create His vessels of

election, able to transform flinty souls into evangelists of His grace and glory. So, amid all the complex mechanism of Christian service, we may well take heed lest in our activities we lose sight of their supreme End. Not long ago the Bishop of London confessed that 'we are all in danger of being snowed under by machinery,' and called for a special mission to bring his diocese back to God. Those Christians who have wrought most mightily to heal the wounds of the world have prevailed by virtue of their own mystical union with the Everlasting Lover and Redeemer of souls. And the only voice that can reach the heart is the voice that cries, out of the depths of inward experience, 'Behold your God!'

God's Shepherding

Is. xl. 11.—'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.'

THIS promise was given to a people who had good cause for remembering the road it speaks of. It was only fifty years since, in utter misery, their fathers had been urged along it by their conquerors. Sir George Adam Smith recalls Assyrian sculptures where the captives were driven in gangs like negroes to the coast, or convicts to Siberia, pushed on by soldiers in the ranks, whilst the weak, who could not keep the pace, were tossed aside to die. An experience like that is burned into the memory of a nation, and after half a century the horror of it was undiminished; so this promise was peculiarly cheering, as it spoke of a return under the most opposite conditions. The image of the shepherd suggests a leisured progress, where none is overdriven and the feeblest rules the pace of all; and their Shepherd is Jehovah, so that at every step they may look for the sheltering, provident kindness of Almighty God.

Such was the promise to ear and heart; but how was it kept? As to that, two reports might be given; for though the journey home was not bitter and shameful like the journey out, it was yet anxious and laborious. Only a fraction of the exiles, and these the stronger, had even dared to attempt the road; and when they reached their goal they bore the marks of hardship. Ezra tells of the qualms with which, in a later day, he led his party across the perilous waste. Success attended both the

marches, but some were ready afterwards to mock at the anticipations of these poets. They promised us a shepherding of God, easy, gentle, unanxious! And we scarcely slept at night; and we came to Jerusalem tired to death, a hungry and ragged company. But that is the way with poets; their gorgeous cloud-castles, when you climb up to them, are banks of blinding fog; the magnificent promise has in it only the poorest core of fact. That was one report, but there was another. 'We were as men that dreamed,' they sang, 'the Lord hath done great things for us;' for brave and good men have a magnanimous way of viewing their discomforts. It was God who gave us courage to attempt the road, and patience to endure, and fresh resource for each new danger. If mean men sneered at the exposure of the hollowness of the promise, there were many also to praise God with astonished hearts, because of His generous fulfilment of it; and they taught the promise to their children as a word which they had themselves found true, 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.'

Such opposite reports of one experience are renewed in every age and society. In God's working the best things are not upon the surface. Our Lord said, '*He that is of the truth* heareth my words,' as if some preparation of heart were needful; and God's shepherding is never so obvious that men might be drawn to it by mere self-interest.

1. God's work in leading men is a task worthy of Himself. When we say, 'He feeds his flock like a shepherd,' we need, as in other poetry, to use our common sense, for most of us have, at some time, suffered whilst idly ingenious preachers elaborated an image far beyond the point at which resemblance ceases. It is not sheep that God cares for first; and a great deal which might be imagined as to a shepherd's work and way is out of all relation to the Divine guidance of men. 'Ye, my sheep, the sheep of my shepherding, are men,' says Ezekiel; and the difference is enormous when that is borne in mind. Sheep are to us the very pattern of creatures without judgment or foresight, and the whole business of managing them proceeds on that footing. They must be thought for and guarded against their own folly, whilst men are best led by practising them in leading themselves, and sometimes they can

be finally delivered from folly only by being permitted to taste their folly to the end. Sheep are driven on unknowing, unasking, whilst men are forced, at every moment, to choose, decide, adventure for themselves; and if it were possible, over any lengthened period, to have the life of a community ruled as sheep are, you would have, in the end, not men but sheep—helpless, planless, characterless, a race destroyed. Sometimes an effort has been made to break away from this principle of life, and, as in the Jesuit rule, to put one man absolutely in the hands of another, the passive instrument of his will; but such experiments have never worked for good. Both human nature and the thought of God the Shepherd are clean against them. For He seeks not merely, as a shepherd does, to bring His flock to its destination with numbers undiminished, He aims at improving as well as preserving; and since responsibility and peril are instruments in human education, He will not have us escape from these.

The task is worthy of God, for the greatness of the leader rises with the quality of those whom he leads. If God's government of men were a kindly absolutism, like a shepherd's with his flock, if there were no mind and will but His, and we moved simply as moved by Him, the task would be a plain one; but then, how empty human life would be! So He calls our minds and wills awake; 'ye, my sheep, are men,' He says. He works through our liberty and uses our mistakes for our advancement. He counts it a lighter thing in us to err in the exercise of our judgment than not to judge at all. As Jowett says, 'We should speak of conscience, duty, obligation, not of development and evolution; because we desire to strengthen that side of man which raises him above nature, not that which identifies him with it.' And the real glory of God the Shepherd can be seen only when we do justice to our human liberty. An absolutist God would have nothing but a race of puppets, and thus He would be a little God; but our God is a great God, and His creatures are men; and the wisdom by which He guides them, in their liberty, is a wisdom that is inexhaustible.

2. The way in which He leads is also worthy, though of that it is hard to speak aright. His love is not for a few, but there are few who

fully know His love. In this chapter the image changes abruptly, and the man of war, making way by strength of hand, gives place to the shepherd with the lamb in his arm. Many can appreciate the first image who know nothing of the second. Behind the infinitudes of space and the inexorableness of law, they have not found a tenderness which consoles. Many have come to recognize that they are not masters of their own fortune, but are being led where they did not mean to go, and set to tasks they never would have chosen for themselves. However high and sure a man's confidence may be at the outset, he learns that there is another strength against which his purposes are shattered. But that discovery of a superintending Power is a long way short of the knowledge of the Shepherd, 'by which name,' says Calvin, 'the prophet expresses God's immeasurable love to us;' and no one can be said rightly to know God until he has found in Him, not strength only, and wisdom, and foresight, but also kindness. When it is said, 'He gathers the lambs with his arm,' it is in the arms of His power that He gathers them; how sure and wonderful a place for a weak man to find his rest in! The love of God must never be thought of as a caprice; it is an infinitely strong thing, with as little of caprice in it as the procession of the stars. 'The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee;' for the kindness of God is the inner side of His strength. Unless that is kept in view, we shall not understand the way in which God feeds His flock, for that has nothing of soft-heartedness in it. He does not guard them from strain and pain; He gives them the profit of these. Our Lord Himself was made perfect for His high task through suffering, and by the same way the disciple must come to completeness.

¶ Few men in our day have seen more trouble or felt it more deeply than Cardinal Mercier, and yet this is what he says of it himself: 'Suffering, accepted and vanquished, will give you a serenity which may well prove the most exquisite fruit of your life.'

What if Thou hadst led my soul
To the pastures where dull souls feed;
And set my steps in smooth paths, far away
From the feet of those that bleed;

Penned me in low, fat plains,
Where the air is as still as death,
And Thy great winds are sunk to a breath,
And Thy torrents a crawling stream,
And the thick steam of wealth goes up day and night,
Till Thy sun is a veiled light,
And Heaven shows like a vanished dream!
My being had waked dull and dead
With the lusts of a gross desire;
But now Thou hast purged me thoroughly, and burnt
My shame with a living fire.
So burn me, and purge my will
Till no vestige of self remain,
And I stand out white without spot or stain.

3. But one must be a man to recognize it. 'Christ feeds His people,' says Cruden, 'by His word, grace, fullness, redemption, ordinances, providences,' but no one of these can, of itself, make life stronger. We must stir up ourselves to meet them. The words of Scripture may simply encumber our memories, because we have not adventure of heart to lay hold upon them.

And specially, we need to keep in mind the largeness of God's end for us. He is not content that we should be as we are, but is leading us towards vast, distant things which might easily be set aside as unattainable; and experiences which are disproportioned to our present desires and expectations may very well be on the scale of His great purposes. The danger is of our missing the advantage of our discipline by cherishing hopes too narrow. A critic has said about some Socialist ideals, 'The New Jerusalem may be fitted up, but these miners will never reach it. They will fight for the first small, stuffy, middle-class villa they meet on the way.' How aptly might this judgment be passed on a multitude of Christian men!

There is a verse of Scripture, dear to many hearts, which bears within it all that we have been saying: 'The Lamb shall be their Shepherd, and shall lead them to the living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' That, in telling of the good end, tells also of the way, which is not without sorrow, for there are tears, and not without weariness, else would there be no need of fountains. With good heart, then, let us submit to His direction, sure that He sees to the

end, and that what He allows is not without its meaning.

¶ O might it please God that we should little regard the course of the way we tread, and have our eyes fixed on Him who conducts us, and on the blessed country to which it leads! What should it matter to us whether it is by the desert or by the meadows we go, if God is with us and we go into Paradise? ¹

What is God Like?

Is. xl. 18.—‘To whom then will ye liken God?’

WE are bound to think of God more or less in terms of ourselves. We have no option but to conceive of Him after our own likeness. We begin by asking, what are the highest and noblest qualities which we can discover in mankind? We have thought, will, and feeling, and these involve self-consciousness, memory, and purpose. God must have these attributes in perfection; He must be perfect personality. So far, so good. But there is nothing very thrilling about such a description as that. It does not warm the heart, or kindle within us any feeling of love to God. If we want to know what God is like, we must ask what the great seers and saints say about Him, and we must seek to walk the same pathway as they have trod. God is known by experience. They can best describe His nature who have met Him face to face, have heard His voice, and felt His touch.

One of the chief marks of this prophet is that he has had a great experience. This chapter is not a philosophic disquisition on the Godhead, but the outpouring of deep and glowing experience. The prophet lives in the very presence of God and knows what God is like. But his experience is not the result of a merely emotional response to the revelation of God. It is also the outcome of an intellectual response. He has not only felt deeply, he has reflected deeply. With a pen that is dipped in fire, the prophet draws the picture of God in outline. It is ours to fill it in with the beautiful, rich, harmonious colours of the New Testament and we shall know what God is like.

1. *Revelation in Nature.*—The prophet bids us look at the stars. We recall Napoleon’s

¹ St Francis de Sales.

famous reply to the atheistic professors: ‘Who was it, gentlemen, that made these stars?’ That reply is only an echo of the words of the prophet: Who is it who brings out the innumerable hosts of heaven and calls them all by name, so that not one is lacking? ‘Who was it, gentlemen, that made these stars?’ There is only one answer.

But the stars are not merely a proof of the existence of God, they are a revelation of His nature. There are some who tell us that we must not look to Nature for any revelation of the character of God. They say that Nature is non-moral, and that we must turn our eyes in other directions if we want to know what God is like. That is not the teaching of the Old Testament seers. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God,’ says the Psalmist, and what is the glory of God but His nature? ‘Night unto night showeth knowledge,’ he goes on. The glories of the starlit night do not simply stir the emotions; they bring knowledge. To scan the heavens is to learn something of the mind and will of God.

The prophet points his people, captive in Babylon, to the stars. It seemed to them that it was a chaotic and disordered world in which they lived. They were prisoners, mingling with captives from many lands. They dwelt in the midst of a confusion of tongues and customs and religious beliefs. And the prophet says to them—the night is dark, but look up and see what God is like. To the uninitiated, the heavens seem to be a confused medley of stars, but he who has spent long nights in the contemplation of the firmament, assimilating the knowledge which night showeth unto night, knows better. Written on the heavens are order and unfailing guidance. And He who orders the paths of the stars orders also the ways of men. ‘He gathereth the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars.’

¶ As a teacher of religion I rejoice that at last in New York City we are promised a planetarium. A hard-headed, hard-driving friend of mine recently told me that the most moving religious experience he had had for years was not in church, where he rarely goes, but in a planetarium, where before his eyes was unrolled the spectacle of the universe in its unity, order, simplicity, and intelligibility. ‘Man,’ he said to me, ‘the word “chance”

doesn't fit in. There is mind in that.' I suspect there is, for otherwise, as another has said, 'it takes more mind to construe the universe than to construct it.'¹

If we turn to the New Testament, and look at the picture with all the colours filled in, we find that He who numbers the stars and calls their names is also the Good Shepherd, who 'callesth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out.' His eye passes along the serried ranks and sees if one is missing. He goes over desert and mountain in search of the solitary wanderer and, when He has found him, carries him home rejoicing.

Sometimes at eve, in daylight's slow withdrawing

I watch the blue grow deeper, and the stars
Melt into flame, swift, splendid, overawing—

Flinging on earth their hosts of silver spars.

And I bethink me, God, who made their courses,
Quenching their fires with every dawning
sun,

Draws on His memory's infinite resources,
Calling them to their stations one by one.

Shepherd of stars, who yet in loving kindness
Stoopest on earth to bind the broken heart—
When my dim eyes are sealed by life's last
blindness,
Recall them then to waking where Thou art.

2. *Revelation in History.*—What is the view of God which the prophet deduces from history? He says that he discerns One who is Omnipotent, the ruler of the kings of the earth, who brings princes to nothing; One who is the Judge of all the earth, whose reward is with Him and His recompense before Him; One who is perfect in wisdom, and who delights in mercy.

Power, rule, authority, wisdom, judgment, mercy—can we find that combination working through all history? It is difficult to read the story of the past without being driven to the conclusion that there is a meaning, a purpose, a unity in it all. There is a science which is called the philosophy of history. Its object is to lay bare the hidden meanings and processes of our human story, to show how the events of the present have their roots in the events of the past, to trace the outworkings of great principles, to seek out the causes of the rise and fall of

empires and civilizations, to explain the genesis and describe the effects of great movements of thought and action, to show how sublime ideas have fertilized the world and how base ideas have laid it waste; in short, to make manifest how 'through the ages one increasing purpose runs.'

There are those who say that the universe is a great machine. The power which we discern is the power of the machine; the judgment is the inexorable working of the machine; the wisdom is the loyalty of the machine to the laws of its own being. Yes, but this is a machine in which sovereignty and free will work together; in which power is not blind and unrestrained, but is controlled and directed by wisdom; and in which judgment is tempered with mercy. These are the characteristics not of a machine but of a Personality, and to our lips there rushes instinctively the word 'God.'

Let us look more closely at these antithetical qualities which we can see working through all history.

(1) The universe reveals to us an omnipotent sovereign power, which fulfils its purposes without encroaching on man's free will. History sets before us two facts which, we should say, were absolutely contradictory to each other, were it not that we have seen them reconciled in our own experience and in that of others. First of all, a Power that moves through the ages, slowly but surely overcoming all opposition and accomplishing its righteous purposes; then, on the other hand, man free to choose between good and evil, at liberty to accept or reject the will of God, maker of his own history and master of his own destiny. The two things are absolutely incompatible with one another, we say. But the simple truth is that they are reconciled in history and experience.

(2) History shows us the working of a Power that is restrained and directed by wisdom. As we study its pages, we are conscious that an invisible Hand has been guiding the forces which make for righteousness. Again and again we have felt that had those forces been under our control we should have used them in other and better ways. But every time our wisdom has been put to confusion, and we have discovered that 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men.' It may take a long time for the truth to come home to us. Perhaps many centuries elapse before men fully apprehend

¹ H. E. Fosdick, *The Secret of Victorious Living*, 188.

how wise were the guidance and control of God in some great crisis of history. As we read the story of our race we are impressed not merely by mighty manifestations of power, but by restraints of power which were no less mighty, and which subsequent events prove to have been so wise that we are compelled to bow before the revelation of infinite Wisdom.

(3) As we look at history, we see kingdoms and empires overthrown because of their iniquity. We see the wicked judged by his own conscience and by the world. We see deep graven on the pages of history the words, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' But we can also discern mercy writ large in history. Again and again we see opportunity prolonged and repeated, and the appeal allowed, 'Let it alone this year also.' Over and over again we find that punishment is not merely retributive but reformative, and that those who brought themselves under condemnation are purged into newness of life. Not once or twice, but ten thousand times, we see mercy rejoicing against judgment.

Now when we turn to the New Testament we see this outline with the colours filled in. The Cross is the epitome of the gospel. What do we see there? We see omnipotence submitting to be reviled by human freedom, and in that very act of submission opening out for men the path to a wider freedom, even the glorious liberty of the children of God. We see power guided and controlled by wisdom. Christ used His power, as He has used it in all ages, with the restraint of His wise and sacrificial love. In the Cross we also see judgment and mercy. The Cross was the judgment of this world. What more terrible judgment could the world pronounce on itself than that it should crucify the Lord of Glory? What more severe judgment could God pronounce on sin than that even in the person of His own dear Son it must be resisted unto the death and overthrown. But the Cross is also a revelation of mercy—not of mercy rejoicing against judgment, but of mercy rejoicing in and with judgment. It is the revelation of God's boundless love, of His hand outstretched to save even while He condemns, and of His unwillingness 'that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.'

¶ At the end of that wonderful play called *Green Pastures*, the world has come to such a

pass that the Angel Gabriel asks permission to blow the trumpet that will bring everything to an end. But God sees a better way. He sees that love must stand in with those who have disowned it, and suffer; and the play ends with the cry of those who see the Cross. 'Oh, look! They are making Him carry that Cross up that high hill. It's a terrible burden for one man to carry.'¹

3. *Revelation in Experience*.—'Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?' God is One who unweariedly pursues the souls of men out of His passion for redemption, and having found them, He breathes into them an exhaustless energy, so that lassitude and weariness are forgotten, and they are 'more than conquerors.' He does not view our conflicts, our sufferings, and our aspirations from afar. He fights with us, suffers with us, and strengthens us in all our holy endeavours. Mr Wells says that he wants a God who is with us in the struggle. Well, here He is. 'He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength.'

¶ 'Alas; alas,' wailed Muhammad's one remaining follower, as the pursuers closed in on their hiding-place, 'we are undone: for what are two against so many.' 'Not so,' whispered back the prophet, 'we are not two, but three; for God is with us.' Yes, there are always two of us at least. However lonely be the road we have one sure Companion; however personal be the sorrow, one other shoulder bears our burden with us. However far we wander from Him, He is always with us; never so certainly as in the heart of a temptation, never so close as when He stoops to lift us after some grievous fall.²

Are these things true? Read the religious literature of all ages, the literature of all the religions. It witnesses not only to 'the unutterable thirst of man for God,' but to God's striving and pleading and energizing in the human heart. The records of the religious experience of mankind bear witness to God's unwearied search for and tireless pursuit of man over desert and mountain. 'I could not have found thee, except thou hadst sought me'—that is the instinctive cry of all those

¹ James Reid.

² A. J. Gossip.

who have found God. Despite our wanderings we have found Him, because 'He fainteth not, neither is weary.'

Before the world, O soul, I longed for thee,
And still I long, and thou dost long for Me;
And when two longings meet, for ever stilled,
The cup of love is filled.

Once again we must turn to the New Testament if we are to see the glory of the finished picture. The gospel was but the enactment in Palestine of the drama which this prophet knew to be as old as the world. The Incarnation and the Cross are a revelation of God's unwearied pursuit of man, of His fellowship in our sufferings, and of His participation in our struggles, and of the love wherewith He loved even to the uttermost. 'He fainteth not, neither is weary.' Is that true? Yes, 'the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.' *That is what God is like.*

The Upward Look

Is. xl. 26.—'Lift up your eyes on high.'

ALL our difficulties and embarrassments of whatever nature, if traced to their original cause, are seen to be the result of an insufficient looking unto the Lord. When, for any cause, we take our eyes from off Him, looking either to self or to surroundings, we court disaster. Retrospection fills us with shame, circumspection brings nothing but perplexity, and introspection induces despair. In the upward look to Him 'with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,' is alone our present good and future assurance. Like the disciples on the Mount, it is when we lift up our eyes and, seeing 'no man save Jesus only,' are henceforth blinded to all other glory save to His alone that we have learned the secret of abiding strength and sanctity. To see and recognize Him as Saviour and Lord, once marred but now mighty, imparts to life both a new purpose and a new power.

1. The upward look corrects the ever-present tendency to which all of us are more or less prone—to absorption in the things of this life. Only the light of the eternal falling upon the things of time can keep us in constant remembrance of their uncertain value and continuance. To become absorbed by them, being possessed

where we should possess and being ruled where we should ourselves rule, is a misusing of life and a misspending of strength for that which profits not. The upward look assures us that life is ordered, both in general scope and in intimate detail, by Him whose love is not merely universal but individual in its concern for men. Life's facts are seen to be His purposes, and this alone explains and interprets those untoward experiences from which all men naturally shrink, and produces a calm trust and gladness amid all that tends to disconcert and dishearten.

2. The upward look ennobles our conception of duty—that stern necessity of which such a large part of life is made up. In its light alone we recognize that all work is worship, and that there is a glory in doing earthly things with heavenly aims which nothing equals. Duty is no longer regarded as irksome compulsion by the one who lives with uplifted eye; it is rather his opportunity for voicing the devotion of his heart. Nothing is more touching and illuminating than the record of the boy Samuel, who, in the watches of the night, had been called to lift up his eyes on high and had there seen a Divine vision of great and far-reaching importance to himself and his nation, but who the next morning went about his ordinary duty and 'opened the doors of the House of the Lord.' His moments of vision had not unfitted him for the humblest service of his office, but had rather inspired him to its faithful performance! It is the upward look which alone confers the power of patient continuance in well-doing. For much of our life's toil is unapplauded. The external stimulus of appreciation, gratitude, and encouragement is almost entirely lacking in many a life, but the consciousness of His watchful consideration and loving understanding of all our efforts is always sufficient incentive to fidelity. Work done for His eye and to secure His approval is always well done. Hence the upward look is not that of a mere visionary or contemplative mystic, but the heart attitude of the faithful and diligent servant.

¶ One of General Foch's military maxims is this: 'Every soldier must see his General—must feel himself in communication with him, and never be allowed to consider himself merely a poor pawn manœuvred by an unknown

power.' The conditions of modern warfare have rendered that maxim wellnigh impracticable. But it is a maxim of Christian warfare that can never be outdated. 'Every soldier must see his Leader.' Without that vision and communion service becomes slavery.¹

And indeed the upward look enlarges our conception of service. For our Lord Himself bids us lift up our eyes and look upon fields that are already 'white unto the harvest.' The uplifted eye sees the world's need as a dark background to the Saviour's brightness, and with expanding consciousness of the gloom of sin comes a quickened impulse to service and sacrifice. The upward look has been in all ages the inspiration to onward effort, and those whose lives are to us as stimulating examples laboured and died to save men just because they had first seen the Lord 'high and lifted up.' This is the secret of the lives of Carey and Martyn, of Chalmers and Keith-Falconer, of Moody and Shaftesbury, of Grenfell and Schweitzer. They were one and all men whose eyes were lifted up on high, far beyond considerations of self-advantage and gain, so that they saw something of the need which compelled their Lord to the Cross.

3. The upward look brings also into life a power for the bearing of the strain which Christian service inevitably imposes. The pathway of the disciple is the same as that trodden by the Master, whose service meant suffering and anguish as well as the bitterness of ingratitude and hostility. And few, if any, of those who seek to follow in His steps escape similar experience. But he whose heart's attention is directed on high 'where Christ sitteth' learns to endure 'as seeing him who is invisible.'

¶ I have never forgotten Robert Louis Stevenson's panegyric on Father Damien's work among the lepers on Molokai. Those who read it in youth are not likely to forget it even in old age. That estranging disease which banishes its victims from healthy society and normal human intercourse rendered necessary the removal of many lepers from Honolulu to the leper island. Father Joseph Damien sailed with them out of the entrancingly beautiful harbour of Honolulu, joyfully becoming their lifelong companion in tribulation.

¹ H. E. Luccock.

With his freight of appalling human misery he reached the shores of Molokai to be welcomed by the physical remnants of the colony who were able to travel from their huts to the shore. 'Half clothed, ragged and dirty, many of them with faces stained and scarred, sometimes almost shapeless with the ravages of leprosy, with hands and feet maimed and bleeding, mortifying limbs and decaying flesh, there they were gathered in ghastly groups; and these were the most healthy inhabitants of the island; the more helpless and dying were lying in the settlement two or three miles away.' How long would Joseph Damien remain on this island of human derelicts? 'Now, Joseph, my boy, this is your life work,' he had said to himself. But how would he stick it? Without ostentation he became one with the members of the colony. In correspondence he refers to 'we lepers.' In his own arms he often carried the dead to their last earthly resting-place. And then one day, after ten years of heroic sacrificial service, the suspicion is confirmed—leprosy has claimed the valiant great heart. What is his reaction in that testing hour? The lepers are dearer and nearer than ever. He is their cheerful servant and refuses to leave them. And why? Because having seen the King Invisible he never flinched. Ponder this glowing sentence, written by a man who was contemporary with many of us—'I would not be cured if the price of my cure was that I must leave the island and give up my work.'¹

The tragic thing is that it is possible for us to look up and then go back. The conflict between our perception and our power seems often to end disastrously, for we invariably see more than we are able to do, and much that we are unable to do. And not infrequently the cost of applying ourselves to the realization of the ideal is a strong deterrent, despite the fact that to go back from Him who has shined into our hearts is to follow in the steps of one who 'went away sorrowful.' A harvest of eternal sadness is reaped by everyone who, having been illuminated, turns with a downward gaze to live for lesser things than the glory of God. Let us then convert this general invitation which in varying tones and terms rings throughout the whole Evangel into a personal resolution which shall be the deter-

¹ W. E. Blackburn, *Christ Shows the Way*, 132.

mining force of all life's attitudes and activities : ' I will lift up mine eyes '—' I will go in the strength of the Lord God.'

The Cry of Depression

Is. xl. 27.—' Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God ? '

To a degree that we can hardly understand, God and land were connected in antiquity. A nation could suffer almost any punishment so long as it was living in its country, but whenever they were driven away, as Israel had been driven away to Babylon, they at once thought that God had forgotten to be gracious. It was not that they were badly treated in Babylon, for the evidence is all the other way. No doubt they were allowed to build their synagogues and possibly to traffic in the market. But the thing that moved them to their deeps was this, that God seemed to have forgotten all about them. And so with dreary eyes they looked at one another, and said, ' My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.'

There are two things to bear in mind if we are to understand how utter was their desolation, and the first is the thought of the Exodus. The great hour in Israel's history was when God delivered them from Egypt, took them from the house of bondage, carried them to the Promised Land ; and the very glory of the Exodus was just this, that they were under the leadership of God. Every morning when they awakened, there before them was the pillar of cloud. Every night when they went to rest, there, burning, was the pillar of fire. And can we not understand the awful desolation when that leadership was taken away ? Again, we have to think of the names they give to God here. They call Him ' Lord,' that is, ' Jehovah ' : and then they say ' My God.' Not only was He ' Jehovah ' their own, their covenant God, but He was ' My God,' and He had left them. If a little child were travelling with a casual stranger, and the casual stranger disappeared, the child might cry, but it would not really be broken-hearted. But if the child said, ' The woman who has left me is my mother,' then it would be broken-hearted. And Israel cried out, ' He is my God.' It was a dark spiritual

desolation. The awful agony of the Exile to people so spiritual as the Jews was this, ' My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.' And that is not only the cry of history ; it is also a cry of the human heart.

Let us think of some of the reasons that tempt us to utter this cry, ' My way is hid from the Lord.'

1. Many people are tempted that way now, just because of *the vastness of our universe*. To the Psalmist the world in which he lived was the centre of all created things, and above the world there was the heaven, and not very far beyond it was the Throne of God. And of course, if we believe that, it is very easy to think that God is watching us, and that we are of tremendous importance in His sight. But, thanks to our modern knowledge, the earth has been cast out of its centrality ; it is a little insignificant planet, one of a million bigger than itself ; it is of no more value than a grain of sand. When we grasp that, is it not sometimes very easy to say, ' My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God ' ? And the awful thing is that, when we say it, life becomes incredibly difficult ; it takes away the spirit from a man.

¶ There is a story told of Lord Tennyson, the former Poet Laureate. After spending some time in gazing through a Greenwich telescope at the starry heavens, he was asked by the astronomer, ' And what do you think of it, my lord ? ' His answer was : ' I was thinking of what little consequence are some of our noble families.' And that is what many are thinking of the human race itself. We seem to be mere specks in space ; human microbes, but audacious enough to imagine that we are of consequence to the Universe, and still more audacious to believe in our best moments that we have an immortal destiny.¹

2. Are we not very often tempted to say it just by *the bitter disappointments of life* ? We find that in the Bible constantly ; and whenever we find anything in the Bible over and over again, that means that it is common to the human heart. Job was a bitterly disappointed man. He had sought to serve God with a perfect heart ; he had looked for the

¹ F. C. Spurr.

reward of virtue, and here he was sitting in the ashes. And the whole temptation of the Book of Job is just this, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.' Or, again, take the Baptist when he was in prison. He had looked for Christ with His axe and with His fan, and here was a meek and lowly Saviour, and in the bitterness of his disappointment this was his temptation, to echo the cry of the exiles in Babylon. Or, once again, we read in Second Peter that the people were looking for the coming of the Lord; every morning they expected Him; they said, 'The Lord is coming to-day!' And when the months went on and the Lord did not come, they were bitterly disappointed, and what they said was just the cry, 'My way is hid from the Lord.' And it is the same to-day. When somebody we trust disappoints us, when some plan we have raised becomes a house of cards, when some prize we strove for somebody else gets, when illness interrupts our work, when the chair is empty and the grave is full, are we not tempted still to cry, although perhaps we never do it openly, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God'?

¶ John Ruskin has told us how, when he came into clearer light, his hope of some better service was cut off by failure of health. 'Just when I was coming out of school, very sorry for having been such a foolish boy, yet having taken a prize or two, and expect now to enter upon some more serious business than cricket, I am dismissed, by the Master I hoped to serve, with a "That's all I want of you, sir."'

3. Sometimes we are tempted to say this when we experience *delays in prayer*. There is nothing so trying to a man's faith as just to be delayed in the answers to his prayers. Thomas Boston of Ettrick, that saint whose name makes fragrant the valleys of the south, in his diary says frequently, 'Got my studies over and so went to prayer, because I have a suit pending before God.' Years before he had begun praying for something, and it was like a suit pending before God, and he was praying still. How many of us have got faith like that? When Martha and Mary sent for Christ, when to-morrow morning came He was not there, when evening fell and there was no sound of His footstep, would not Martha look

to Mary and say, 'Mary, our way is hid from the Lord, and our judgment is passed over from our God'? And that is why Christ tells us insistently that we are never to faint in prayer. When we pray for light and we do not get light; when we are only plunged into a deeper darkness; when we pray for strength against our besetting sin and the next temptation unhorses us, and there we are, supine in the dust; when we pray for a blessing for some dear one, and the years go on and it never seems to come, are we not tempted, just like those exiles in Babylon, to say, 'My way is hid from the Lord'? There is a very true sense in which the whole of Scripture is just an answer to that temptation; but there are three great arguments that Scripture uses to men like us, in that condition.

(1) There is *the argument from Nature*. And observe that that is the prophet's argument. He says, 'Lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created these things,' and 'these things' are the stars. 'He calleth *them* (put the emphasis on 'them') all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.' We have to picture the prophet sitting amid the Jews on the sands of Babylon, and above them the glittering stars of the Eastern night, and he says, 'Children, if God names every one of these, if God makes their rising and their setting, do you think your way is hid from Him?' It is the argument of the prophet, it is the argument of Jesus; only Jesus does not bid us look up, He bids us look down. He does not say, 'Look up at the stars'; He says, 'Look down at that little flower at your feet.'

Confide ye aye in Providence, for Providence is kind,

And bear ye a' life's changes with a calm and tranquil mind,

Tho' pressed and hemm'd on every side, hae faith and ye'll win thro',

For ilka blade o' grass keps its ain drap o' dew.

(2) There is *the argument of history*, and the true reason why histories are in the Bible is not to give subjects for historical criticism; the very object of histories in the Bible is to enable us to say, when everything is dark, 'Thank God, I can trust in Him.' Think of Joseph. When Joseph was carried down to Egypt, away

from his father and his home, heart-broken, bound in the caravan for a strange country, don't you think Joseph was crying, 'My way is hid from Jehovah'? and yet we have the story. Joseph was in the lap of God, Joseph was on the way to honour and to his crown. Or think of Paul. We know there came a day in Paul's life when he wanted to get into Bithynia and could not, and he wanted to get into Mysia and he could not, and the only road open was by the sea, and, like a true Jew, Paul hated the sea. And we may suppose him saying, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God'; and he was on the way to Europe, he was on the way to the evangelization of the world. Every history written in the Bible is written for its moral ends, and the great end of all of them is this, that when it is dark, when every star is dim, when the heart is empty and is aching, we can never say again, 'My way is hid from the Lord.'

¶ Listen to Phillips Brooks after he had failed and been dropped from his position: 'I don't know what will become of me and I don't care much'; 'I shall not study a profession'; 'I wish I were fifteen years old again. I believe I might make a stunning man: but somehow or other I don't seem in the way to come to much now.' Listen to Phillips Brooks' father, concerned about his son, so humiliated that he will not talk even with his friends: 'Phillips will not see anyone now, but after he is over the feeling of mortification, he will come and see you.'

There is a sense in which Brooks never recovered from the disappointment. At the flower of his career he came down once from the office of President Eliot of Harvard white as a sheet and fairly trembling because he had declined what he knew to be his last opportunity to become a teacher. He wanted Bithynia and he got Troas but through Troas he found the door into a service that if he had lived a hundred lives he might never have found again.¹

(3) There is *the argument of Christ*. It is the quiet utterance of these words, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' When we think how our Saviour kept His eye upon the one, a poor woman, of no value, no social standing at all; when we think how He traced the one, followed Peter through all his circuit-

ings and windings, and then when we say, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,' however we may be tempted, however difficult life has been, however hard it is to think that we are in the hands of love, if we are faithful, we can never say again, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.'

Clouds were Thy chariots and I knew them not,
They came in solemn thunders to my ear;
I thought that far away Thou hadst forgot,
But Thou wert at my side and Heaven was near.
The darkness of my night has been Thy day,
My stony pillow was Thy ladder's rest;
And all Thy angels watched my couch of clay
To bless my soul, unconscious it was blest.

The God of Nature

Is. xl. 28.—'The Creator of the ends of the earth.'

ONE striking feature of the Old Testament is the way in which the writers of it fall back for comfort upon the God of Nature. Never was there a nation in the world more jealous of religious privilege than the Jews. They stood to God in covenant-relationship which no man could share in save through circumcision. And the strange thing is how often their great writers, when they are seeking comfort or direction, fall back, *not* on the covenant God, but upon the Lord of heaven and earth. 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,' says the Psalmist. 'Lift up your eyes to the heavens,' cries this prophet. In hill and glen, in sunshine and in star, prophet and psalmist find their ground of hope. It is a very significant thing that, in a people whose God was so intensely national, there should have been such frequency of outlook to the God who made the heavens and the earth.

Now if this is true of the Old Testament, it is still more notably evident in the New. There is a place there, far larger than we think sometimes, for the God who fashioned the valleys and the hills. One might have thought that the Fatherhood of God would have swallowed up everything in the New Testament. And yet those very men whose lives were changed by Christ's deep doctrine of God's Fatherhood,

¹ H. E. Fosdick, *The Hope of the World*, 88.

never ceased to turn for help and comfort to Him who made the heavens and the earth. Christ Himself had led the way in that. 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,' He said. And 'He maketh his rain to fall on the evil and the good.' So the apostles, having learned of Him, went out to the world to proclaim a Father-God, who was none other than the God of Nature. 'It is He who giveth the rain and fruitful seasons' is one of the practical arguments of Paul. And Peter, when he would comfort his vexed readers and encourage them to cast their care on God, bids them commit their souls to Him, because He is a faithful Creator.

Such then is the attitude towards creation that we find in the Old and New Testament. Nature is never handled scientifically nor is she treated of aesthetically. Nature is the woven garb of God, whereon we look as on a royal vesture, and, looking, learn many a thought of help about Him with whom we have to do. What then is it that creation teaches? Viewed solely in the light of Scripture, what has the world to tell us about God?

1. Nature enforces *the unity of God*. There is one truth which all history teaches and which will at once command assent. It is that no real religious life is possible save under the deep sense that God is one. Real religion at the heart of it is the feeling of dependence upon God. It is the resting of the human soul upon the infinite and eternal arm. But if in the region that is beyond the veil there be a hundred warring arms instead of one, anything like dependence is impossible. To have many gods may be the way to art, as it was once long ago in ancient Greece. It may inspire the sculptor in his toil as the thought of the *one* God could never do. But art, even the art of Greece, is purchased at a price that is too great when it is purchased by the uneasy loss of the deep and quickening sense of the Divine. That is why the great religious souls in Greece broke through the pantheon and reached the one. Neither Socrates nor Plato could find rest in a heaven that was swarming with divinities. Nor has the human heart ever found rest there, nor inspiration, nor comfort in distress, but only in the thought that God is *one*.

The Bible proclaims the unity of God, and calls in a twofold witness to attest that revela-

tion. The one is the witness of the human conscience, which is always restless in a divided heaven. This voice within gives an uncertain sound when it is but the echo of a thousand voices. And the other is the witness of creation, which, even to the unscientific Jew, spoke of the unity of the creating mind as audibly as it speaks to us. What is the first word of the creation-story? In the beginning, *God*. And how does the Gospel of St John begin? 'In the beginning was the Word, and *all things* were created by the Word.' That is the uniform attitude of Scripture, and that attitude is very wonderful. Surrounded by nations who saw rival powers in Nature the Jew never faltered in seeing only one. There is one power of the sunshine, said the Persian, and another power of the shadows of the night; but 'I form the light and I create the darkness,' says the Almighty of the Jewish covenant.

2. Nature enforces *the majesty of God*. Luther used to assert that there was a great deal of religion in the possessive pronouns. He meant that when a man can say *My* God, he has advanced far in the religious life. And this is the joy of our faith in Jesus Christ, that with a fullness of appropriation once undreamed of, we can look heavenward in every hour of need, and say with a full heart, *My* God. Now that is the very flower of religion, and that is what Luther meant by his possessive pronouns. And yet have we not seen, have we not felt sometimes, the peculiar peril of that appropriation? Filled with the personal love of God to us and touched with the wonder of His condescension, sometimes we are on the borders of forgetting that He is a God of infinite majesty

Thee while the first archangel sings,
He hides his face behind his wings,
And ranks of shining thrones around
Fall worshipping, and spread the ground.

Lord, what shall earth and ashes do?
We would adore our Maker too!
From sin and dust to Thee we cry,
The Great, the Holy, and the High.¹

Scripture takes infinite pains in every part of it to safeguard the majesty of God; and one of its chosen ways of doing that, and of

¹ Isaac Watts.

showing that He is infinitely great, is to take us by the hand like little children and lead us out into the world of Nature. 'Behold who hath created these things,' that is how the prophet puts it. He taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and all the nations before Him are as nothing; and He ordereth all the armies of the sky, and the stars in their courses fight against His enemies. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth forth His handiwork. When I consider the heavens which Thou hast framed, then say I, What is man that Thou art mindful of him? So we are led out of our little life into the largeness and liberty of Nature, to feel again what we are prone to lose—the awful majesty of the eternal. The nearer God has come to us in Christ, the more we need the message of creation. We need it amid our boundless privileges which have made God our father and our friend, that we may still be hushed and reverent.

¶ 'Among the children of men,' says Ruskin, 'there is always that fearful and bowed apprehension of His majesty, and that sacred dread of all offence to Him, which is called the fear of God.'

¶ Not far removed from his desire for simplicity was his sense of reverence. He admired a rigid sense of duty and awe in the presence of God, and thought it a tragedy that we had so largely lost this element in our religious life. He believed that Jesus would never have considered it safe to say 'Our Father' had He not added the words 'Hallowed Be Thy Name.' When we lose from our religion the sense of the infinite distance that separates the eternal God from the highest of His creatures we lose that antiseptic element in our religion that saves it from lapsing into a corrupt sentimentalism.¹

3. Nature enforces *the faithfulness of God*. There is perhaps no attribute of God harder to credit than His faithfulness. It is not hard to credit God's omniscience, nor is it hard to accept His omnipresence. It is not hard to believe, if we have hearts at all, in His providential and general benevolence. But just quietly to believe that God is faithful, through all life's tangle and all its disappointment, *that* is one of the hardest tasks that has ever yet been set to mortal man.

(1) One reason why it is hard to credit the faithfulness of God is that we are ourselves so unfaithful. We are unfaithful to our own

ideals, and to our own resolves. Now we know that God made man in His own image, but there is a deep sense in which man also makes God in his own image. For he has ever taken that which was deepest in him, and that which was most characteristic of his life, and carried it up into the gates of heaven, and set it to be worshipped on the throne. If constancy, then, had been a human virtue, it would have been easy to think of God as constant. It is just because we are *not* faithful, but are ever sinning and falling from our vision, that it is hard to credit the faithfulness of God.

(2) Another consideration that explains the difficulty is the wonderful nature of God's promises. There are certain promises which men make which it is easy to believe will be fulfilled. They cost no trouble, and involve no sacrifice, and are in no way impossible to keep. But the promises of God, the more we study them, rise to such heights and pass into such deeps, that it takes something more than human wisdom quietly to believe that they are true. If we knew what God was, we could believe them all, but then we only know a little of what God is. But if we only know a little of what God is, we know a great deal of what we are ourselves. And it is that, and all the glaring contrast between the promise of heaven and our hearts, that makes it hard to credit the faithfulness of God.

(3) Again, there is this consideration, that God dwells in heaven and we do not see Him. It is hard to believe in the unfailing interest in us of those whom we never can set eyes upon. They may legislate for us in the way of government, but that is the care of the many, not of the one. They may remember us with kindly help sometimes, but we all need help more intimate than that. Just to believe that those we never see are constant to us in their every thought is never in a world like this an easy business. Now insensibly, but very really, such incredulity affects our heaven. No man hath seen God at any time, yet our only hope is to credit His fidelity. And it is that absence from all sight and touch which is inevitable since God is spirit, that makes it difficult to grasp that He is faithful.

There are many proofs in Scripture of the faithfulness of God, but there is no proof so evident and easy as that which is gathered from the world of Nature. The Jew knew nothing

¹ Leslie S. Peake, *Arthur S. Peake*, 315.

of the laws of Nature of which we speak such a vast deal to-day, but he saw that the night succeeded to the day, and he reaped the harvest spite of storm and rain, and he lifted up his heart to the eternal, and said to himself, *He is a faithful God.* How did the prophet close his word of cheer to men who thought God had quite ignored them? He is the *Creator* of the ends of the earth, he said, who fainteth not, neither is weary. How did Peter comfort the poor church which thought that God had forgotten to be gracious? Commit the keeping of your souls to Him, he cried, as unto a faithful *Creator*.

Waiting and Strength

Is. xl. 31.—‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.’

1. *What is meant by waiting upon God?* When the Bible speaks of waiting upon God, it means something different from doing nothing. We commonly contrast waiting with working, and there is a sense in which the contrast is a just one; but if it leads us to think that waiting is *not* working, it has done wrong to a great Bible word. Think, for example, of the Cabinet minister whose duty it is to wait upon the King. Is that an idle or a sauntering business? Can it be entered on without a thought? Will it not rather claim the whole attention and make the statesman eager and alert? For *him*, at any rate, waiting is not idleness; rather is it the crown of all his toil. In a battle the hardest thing is not the final rush. In that wild moment a man forgets himself and is caught into a mad tumult of enthusiasm. The hardest thing is to stand quiet and wait, while the hail of the enemy’s fire is whistling round—to wait in the darkness and in the face of death, and be forbidden to return the fire. It is that which tries the nerves and tests the heart. It is that which shows the stuff that men are made of. In such an hour a man is not asleep—he is intensely and tremendously alive. To wait upon God is not to be inactive. It is not a state of spiritual torpor. It tests a man and calls his whole being into high vitality. Never was life so strenuous as Christ’s, and the whole of it was a waiting upon God.

Let us try to distinguish some of the elements that lie in the thought of waiting upon God.

(1) The first and most conspicuous is *dependence*. As the patient waits the coming of the surgeon, because in him the hope of life is centred, so, when a man is said to wait on God, it means that he is dependent upon God, and that he has been awakened by the Holy Spirit to realize that he is thus dependent. It is true there is a broad and general sense in which all created beings wait on God. ‘The eyes of all wait on thee,’ says the Psalmist. Just as the earth waits upon the sun that she may be clothed in her summer glory; just as the ocean waits upon the moon that she may be drawn to the fullness of her tides; so every bird that sings, and beast that ravens, is moment by moment waiting upon God. That is a Scriptural meaning of the word; but that is not the meaning of the text. Here the dependence is felt and realized. The soul delights herself in leaning hard. And just as we consciously depend on God for pardon, for sanctification, yes, for everything—just in that measure do we learn the secret of waiting upon Him.

(2) Again, at the heart of waiting is *obedience*. To ‘wait on’ is another term for service. But God abhors the waiting of the lip, if there is not at the back of it the waiting will. Are we not often tempted to narrow down the great words of the Bible? Are there not many for whom waiting upon God means little else than the exercise of prayer? Whenever we pray we wait on God, and waiting is never so blest as when we pray. But the root idea of waiting is not devotion. The root idea of waiting is obedience. We wait on God when we seek to do God’s will, when we say ‘Not my will, but Thine be done.’ We wait on God when we do a kindly deed. When we give a cup of cold water to the thirsty, when we pay a visit of comfort to the sick, when we teach a class for Jesus’ sake, when we hold out a helping hand to anyone in need—in all that ministry, however humble, we are most truly waiting upon God. To wait upon the Lord is to obey, and when the obedience is all steeped in prayer, then it is waiting upon God indeed.

(3) Another element we can distinguish is *love*. For as love is the source of all the finest work, so it is the secret of the finest waiting. Jacob waited for Rachel seven years, and they seemed but a few days for the great love he

bore her. He was strong to wait when others would have wearied, and he was strong because he loved her so. What makes the mother wait upon her child with tireless patience, when it frets and tosses in some childish fever? We know that the secret is a mother's love. So is it with our waiting upon God. Unless we love Him with our heart and soul, our waiting on Him is a shallow thing. And therefore it is that in a Christian's waiting there is a depth and fullness never known before, for love to God is a new thing altogether when once we have looked on the face of Jesus Christ.

2. *How does this waiting upon God renew our strength?*—To realize God's presence in the press of things is one of the great secrets of serenity. There is much waiting upon men (as Dante knew) that is very different in its issues. It may lead to an embittered heart, and find its end in tragic disappointment. But waiting upon God, when it is genuine, is renewing and restorative.

(1) This renewal of strength is rooted in *the personality of God*. A friend will come into our sick-room, and when he leaves everything seems different. We feel better—we find ourselves on the highway to recovery. It is not what our friend has said that makes the difference, for real friends do not preach at sick-beds; it is the mysterious power of personality. It gives when it never thinks of giving. Its truest service does not lie in action, but in the communication of itself by channels which no psychology can trace. Set down Robert the Bruce in captive Scotland, and you kindle patriotism in a thousand hearts. Send General Gordon to the East of London, and in the street-arabs there you catch a spark of Gordon. Antecedent to all teaching is the impact of spirit upon spirit, wherever there is radiant personality.

It is thus that there comes a renewal of our strength when the presence of God is realized. In the sick-room of the heart He may say little, but His radiant personality transforms it. Where He is, abounding life is, and that life is overflowing into us. Where He is there is perfect love, for in the depths of His being He is love. And to wait on God is not to ask for benefits; it is something anterior to that. It is to maintain the consciousness that He is here. The restorative medicine is Himself.

(2) We are renewed by waiting because *it is only to those who wait that God reveals Himself*. Sometimes in the picture galleries of Europe we have been face to face with a great painting, and have to confess that our first feeling has not infrequently been one of disappointment. It is only gradually, as one lingers, and returns, and gazes quietly and intently, that the picture reveals its wonder and its depth. Nobody ever unveils his deepest to the visitor who only visits at rare intervals. We keep our best for those who love our company, in happy and self-forgetful intimacy, eager just to have us for a friend. We must wait on Shakespeare, if we want to know him. In precisely the same way, to know Him we must wait on God. And then St John comes in, perfecting Isaiah, and telling us that eternal life is to know God and Him whom He hath sent. That is how waiting upon God renews our strength. Waiting is the avenue to knowing Him. God reveals the wonder of His being only to those who patiently and passionately wait.

¶ It is related of Schwabe the astronomer that, wishing to determine the relation between sunspots and earth-magnetism, he gave himself to the recording of the varying appearances of the sun's surface. 'For forty-two years, the sun never rose a single morning free of clouds above the flat horizon of the plain at Dessau but the patient telescope of Schwabe was there to confront it.' That is a fine example of scientific waiting upon God. If only Christian men and women would realize that it is infinitely more worth their while to wait thus patiently upon Him, what wonders of Spirit-filled lives we should see!

3. *How does this renewed strength reveal itself?*—In the first place, *it detaches and uplifts*. Think of the eagle as it soars aloft, spreading its mighty pinions to the morning; it rises 'above the smoke and stir of this dim spot' into the clear air that is beyond; and far below it, in the hush of distance, there spreads the panorama of the world—the lonely mountain where it has its eyrie, and the busy cities that are full of men. 'They shall mount up with wings as eagles'—they shall be in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. And they shall have larger vision at that altitude—they shall see life steadily and see it whole.

It is our constant peril to become immersed

in our immediate circumstances, to become buried in them, to be so imprisoned in them that we cannot see them. One of the great dangers in life is not to be able to see the wood for the trees. That is the explanation of the enslaving power of so many cares. We are too much with them. We are too much in them. And they throng us and crowd us until they smother our spirits, and our intelligent control and leadership are lost. All of which means that we too frequently see things out of their true relationships, and therefore we do not see them truly at all. Life becomes a mass of isolated fragments. We do not see life steadily. But now if in some way we could mount up with wings as eagles, we should see one thing as related to another thing, and all things would be set in a large and true perspective.

¶ If you climb to the dome of St Paul's Cathedral and look down, things that loomed large enough when seen on the ground appear very small to you. Which is an illustration of life. For there are things which loom so large to the consciousness of some of God's people that they are losing the real significance of life, and are sacrificing its vital meaning and interest. I will tell you some of the things that look so big now and will look very small when you 'mount up with wings.' Money will look very small, social distinctions and denominationalism will look very small, things that divide the people of God will look very small and very unworthy, and the petty prizes of earth for which men struggle and die will look small enough when you see them from the Heights. This is the life of liberty, and of unity.¹

In the next place, this strength *will show itself in every season when there is stress and strain*. That is the import of the second clause: 'they shall run and not be weary.' Taken alone, to 'run' is just to 'live,' in the vivid imagery of Oriental speech; but in sharp contrast with 'walk'—as we find it here—to 'run' is symbolical of stress and strain. Into every human life, sooner or later, there come these times of tension. All unexpectedly, as on the Sea of Galilee, the waters of life may be tossed into a storm. We may be called to make some great decision; we may be crushed with grievous disappointment; our health may take to itself wings and fly away; we may

have to stand with an empty heart at a full grave;—and it is then that he who waits on God will show to the world the strength that waiting brings, for though the blast is beating on his face, 'he will run and not be weary.'

And this strength *will show itself in the dullest duty of the common day*. For they shall walk along life's common road—'They shall walk and not faint.' Not only in our times of stress and strain, but in our plodding along the weary path, we are mightily helped, and heartened, and encouraged, by the strength that comes from waiting upon God. And do we realize why the prophet puts that last? It is because he keeps the hardest till the end. It is because to be strong in dull and dreary duty is about the hardest task a man can face. It is a noble thing to be brave in tragic moments; but perhaps there is something even nobler than that. It is to be brave, and glad, and strong, and tender, when the sky is grey and when the road is dreary. It is in such seasons—and they form nine-tenths of life—that he who waits on God will show his strength.

¶ Mark Rutherford says: 'There is a proverb that it is the first step which is the most difficult in the achievement of any object, and the proverb has been altered by ascribing the main part of the difficulty to the last step. Neither the first nor the last has been the difficult step with me, but rather what lies between. The first is usually helped by the excitement and the promise of new beginnings, and the last by the prospect of triumph; but the intermediate path is unassisted by enthusiasm, and it is here we are so likely to faint.'

¶ Mr Hugh Redwood tells the story of a slum sister of East London. Small and frail, she worked longer hours than any trade union would sanction and, unattended, she went where the police always paraded in couples, and, though in the midst of disease, she came through scatheless. He got to know her and this is his judgment. 'The hidden power of the slum sister was just God. Under God's very real protection she went without fear of men, disease, or even of breaking down under the strain. In her simple way she would say, "You see they who wait on God renew their strength; and I've proved it."'

¹ J. S. Holden, *Your Reasonable Service*, 129.

Walking without Fainting

Is. xl. 31.—‘They shall walk, and not faint.’

‘THEY shall mount up with wings . . . ; they shall run . . . ; they shall walk. . . .’ At first sight this looks like an anticlimax, and the promise reads like a descending promise. If we had wished to use these phrases to illustrate the effects of the strength which God supplies, and if we had wished to use them in an ascending scale, so that each should intensify and carry to a higher point the assertion made in the other, we should have inverted the order, and should have read the clauses thus: ‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall walk, and not faint; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.’ But the prophet begins with the *flying* and ends with the *walking*. As Sir George Adam Smith puts it, ‘Soaring, running, walking; and is not the next stage, a cynic might ask, standing still?’

But on second thoughts we can see that here is no anticlimax. The promise rises from good to better and better to best. The prophet has said the last word about the ‘sufficient grace of God’ when he says that when the soaring and the running are all over—the times of rapture and vision—it still keeps a man trudging along the narrow way of duty without halting or wavering, step after step, day after day.

¶ Frederick W. Robertson, of Brighton, preached a notable sermon upon what he terms the ‘illusiveness of life.’ It is founded upon that text in Hebrews which says that Abraham set out for a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance. He left Ur, as he thought, to receive a country, and yet he died a homeless wanderer, owning nothing in the land but a grave. Now, it was a fine proof of the strength supplied by God’s grace that Abraham was able to leave Ur of the Chaldees, to turn his back upon kindred and friends and home. But Abraham had a radiant vision to sustain and encourage him then. Is it not a far finer proof of the sustaining and strengthening power of the grace of God that Abraham never returned to Ur? His glowing vision soon vanished; his radiant hopes were soon disappointed. It became evident to him that Canaan would never be his, but that he would be a stranger and a pilgrim to the end of his days. And yet

the old man never dreamed of going back; he continued steadfastly in his God-appointed way. That, under the impulse of a great enthusiasm and a radiant hope, Abraham should leave Ur is not nearly so wonderful an illustration of the power of the grace of God as that, amid the stern and bitter and disappointing realities of experience, he should still hold without wavering to his first purpose.

We start life full of high enthusiasms and lofty hopes. We set glorious ambitions before ourselves, and are confident of realizing them. But the years bring their disappointments to us, and we are taught the humbling lesson that we are not going to carry things with a rush. And then comes the temptation to abandon our early ambition, or at any rate to lower it to the standard of the everyday world. And it is the final evidence of the power of God’s grace that, amid the disillusionment of life, it still keeps us faithful to our first and holiest ambitions.

¶ Dr Dale, in a letter to his brother, wrote: ‘It is a great thing to have forty years behind you without any great catastrophe and shame. As time goes on, I think I feel more and more vividly a sense of relief when those I love are safely through another year: the sense of relief is still keener in relation to myself, for I suppose every man thinks his own perils greatest. The ice cracks in such unexpected places—the ship is so apt to strike on rocks when the chart gave no warning of them, that mere safety seems to me a much greater reason for thankfulness than it used to be. To do some great thing is the craving of early ambition: to do quiet duty honestly and without serious falls satisfies the heart when youth disappears.’

Take a few illustrations of this truth.

1. *The History of the Christian Church*.—When we read the Book of the Acts of the Apostles we find that there was about the primitive Church a spontaneity, an enthusiasm, a buoyancy that are wanting in the Church to-day. We come again and again across notices of this kind: ‘And day by day continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.’ The Early Church, though small in number, and planted in the midst of an unbelieving world, was a glad Church, a praising Church. In those early days

the Church mounted up with wings as eagles, and ran and was not weary.

The 'gladness' and enthusiasm of the Early Church was partly due to inexperience of the world, and partly also to a glorious hope that filled the horizon of these early Christians. It was partly due to an inexperience of the world. These first believers had seen the marvellous results that had followed the preaching of Peter on Pentecost, and they anticipated similar results everywhere. They did not reckon with the perversity of the human heart. They did not imagine that men would reject the message and slay the messenger. And it was also due to a glorious hope that filled their horizon and possessed their souls, the hope, namely, that before many years had passed Christ would come back, and take unto Him His great power and reign.

But the belief and the hope were both doomed to disappointment. Men did not receive the gospel as they expected they would. Instead of having their message welcomed, Christians found themselves brought to the stake and the block and the arena. Instead of coming back within the lifetime of the early Christians, nineteen centuries have passed, and still the Lord delays His coming. The Christian Church has an altogether new sense of the strength of sin. She knows that the world is at enmity with God. She realizes, further, that her task is a long and toilsome one. She looks at the sin and misery at home and the heathenism entrenched abroad, and she foresees, not a speedy triumph, but ages of conflict and battle and travail. And yet she 'walks without fainting' and without any wavering, but with dogged resolution has set herself to the task of bringing the whole world into subjection to the rule of Jesus Christ.

¶ Referring to the watchword, 'The evangelization of the world in this generation,' Sir William Robertson Nicoll said: 'It is the watchword of a young impatience, born partly, no doubt, of the modern acceleration of pace, but rooted in the old, false apocalyptic conception of the speedy end of the world. I would like to know what they mean by "evangelizing the world in this generation." Two hundred years of the preaching of the Gospel in any given field have done little more than touch the fringe of it, centuries more being needed to effect evangelization in any valid thoroughgoing sense. This feverish, superficial conception of things springs

from that "irreligious solicitude for God" to which Christian men are strangely addicted, and more than ever in this pragmatic age.'

2. *The Experience of the Christian Minister and the Christian Worker.*—When we enter Christ's service, what dreams we dream and what hopes we cherish! Every Christian minister begins by expecting some sort of millennium to come as the result of his labour. And that man is to be pitied who has no gorgeous visions, no daring hopes of this kind. But we are not long in the work before the disappointments begin. We find that somehow the millennium does not come, and men are far more hard and obdurate than we expected. We begin to feel that in all our attacks upon the world we are but battering against a stone wall, and so sometimes we are tempted to say with Elijah, 'I have spent my strength for nought and in vain,' and abandon the work in despair. But that same grace of God which kindled our first enthusiasm can also enable us to hold on our way in spite of little apparent success, doing our duty bravely, whatever may be the result. And fidelity, in spite of discouragement and difficulty, is a far nobler gift of the grace of God than the enthusiasm of inexperience.

'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said :
'Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this
scene ?'—

'Bravely !' said he ; 'for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living
bread.*'

3. *The Contrast between Youth and Age*—Christian youth, that is, and Christian age. There is all the glory and freshness of a dream about Christian youth. It is beautiful in its hopefulness, its fervour, its buoyancy. And yet there is one thing more beautiful than an enthusiastic young Christian, and that is a faithful old Christian. Paul the aged is a finer and more beautiful sight than young Timothy. It is a joyous sight to see a young man beginning the Christian life. But it is still finer to see an old and white-haired man who has known the

difficulties of the Christian life—who has faced trial and sorrow and death—still true to the Christian ideal, still following with quiet confidence his Lord.

In the history of Christianity many have begun, and were not able to finish. Their early enthusiasm was like the flame of straw—one fierce blaze, and over. Demas forsook Paul, having loved this present world. The young man in the Gospels went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. But the grace of God can inspire and keep us to the end. Some of the buoyancy may be taken out of us by the hard experiences of life, but we shall never falter in our course.

¶ 'We must all be prepared,' says Albert Schweitzer, 'to find that life tries to take from us our belief in the good and the true, and our enthusiasm for them, but we need not surrender them.'

Keep me from turning back !

My hand is on the plough, my faltering hand ;

But all in front of me is untilled land,

The wilderness and solitary place,

The lonely desert with its interspace.

What harvest have I ? But this paltry grain,

These dwindling husks, a handful of dry corn,

These poor lean stalks ! My courage is outworn.

Keep me from turning back !

The handles of my plough with tears are wet ;

The shares with rust are spoiled—and yet—and yet—

Keep me, my God, keep me from turning back.

4. *The Relation between Communion and Daily Duty.*—'They that wait upon the Lord,' says the prophet, 'shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.' They shall have their moments of exaltation and vision and high communion. These moments of rapture and vision are the precious rewards of those who wait upon God. But there is one result of waiting upon God still more precious—'they shall walk, and not faint' ; that is, they shall be made strong to bear up against the fret and care of life ; they shall be strengthened to be Christ's servants in the ordinary walk of life. The result of waiting upon God is a consecrated and ennobled daily life.

It is a comparatively easy thing to kindle religious emotions, but what we find terribly difficult is to live the Christian life. We have

our moments on the mount ; our difficulty comes when we go back on the morrow to our shops, our businesses, our offices. To be a Christian tradesman, a Christian workman, a Christian employer—that is where the difficulty comes. To Christianize our everyday duty is a task so hard that we sometimes despair of it. But listen to this promise : 'They shall walk, and not faint.' They shall be able to Christianize the daily round, the common task. Whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they shall be able to do all to the glory of God.

¶ 'Well, you are going to pack and unpack, for a fortnight. What is it that I would have you quietly set your mind and heart on, during that in itself lonesome and dreary bit of your road, child ? Why, this. You see, all we do has a *double-relatedness*. It is a link or links of a chain that stretches back to our birth, and on to our death. It is part of a long train of cause and effect, in your own chain of life, this chain variously intertwined with other chains and other lives. . . .

'But there is also, all the time, another, a far deeper, a most darling and inspiring relation. Here, you have no slow succession, but you have each single act, each single moment joined directly to God. True, certain other acts, at other moments, will be wanted, of a kind more intrinsically near to God—Prayer, Quiet, Holy Communion. Yet not even those other acts could unite you as closely to God as can do this packing, if the little old daughter does this her packing with her heart and intention turned to God her Home, if she offers her packing as her service, that service which is perfect liberty.' ¹

The longer on this earth we live,

And weigh the various qualities of men,

Seeing how most are fugitive

Or fitful gifts at best of now and then,

Wind-wavered corpse lights, daughters of the
fen ;

The more we feel the high, stern-featured
beauty

Of stern devotedness to duty,

Steadfast and still, nor paid with mortal praise ;

But finding amplest recompense

For life's ungarlanded expanse

In work done squarely and unwasted days.

¹ F. von Hügel, *Letters to a Niece*, 58.

The Seed of Abraham

Is. xli. 8.—‘But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.’

Matt. iii. 9.—‘Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.’

THE juxtaposition of the two texts is no arbitrary one; each of these sentences illustrates a great underlying principle, a mode of thought suggested in the Old Testament and completed in the New.

1. In the passage from the Book of Isaiah is shown the greatest element in the Israelitish national consciousness. Apparently these people never forgot their vocation as the children of Abraham. Sometimes they attributed more importance to it, sometimes less. When the nation was at its best, they spiritualized the ideal; when it was at its worst they materialized it, but they never wholly ignored it. From the first sentence to the last of this Book of Isaiah we have this idea of the vocation of Israel suggested or implied. In the preceding chapter the opening sentences are: ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.’ It is as though he would say to Israel: ‘You have passed through a severe testing time, but you have not ceased to be the people of God. Indeed, the testing time was permitted because you are never to be anything else than the chosen ones, God’s Israel. You have Abraham for your father, and the covenant which God made with Abraham He will keep with you.’ ‘Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.’

2. In the light of this Old Testament consciousness let us look at the passage from the New. The Second Isaiah and John are both heralds; there is at least this similarity between them, that they both come as the bearers of good tidings concerning a better day. But they are different in this. While the prophet speaks with the gorgeous magnificence of Oriental symbolism, and his message is one full of comfort and tenderness, the words of the Baptist are utterly unadorned; rugged and

grim is the speech of this child of the desert. Yet, like the former, he is the herald of a glorious day. He, too, is standing forth with the object of heartening his people and preparing them for the advent of One greater than he. But the people are not ready for his message, or for the blessing which he announces. And so his words to them are words of warning, especially to the Pharisees. The people and their leaders had been inclined to content themselves with making much of the tradition of the covenant of God with Abraham, and they thought comparatively little of what was required from them in the keeping of it. The Pharisees were conspicuous for two particular vices. First, they trusted in their own righteousness and despised others. Their chief sin was that of spiritual pride; but another was that they believed in the externals of religion rather than in change of heart. They insisted much upon their lineage: we are the descendants of Abraham—will not God keep His word to him? What part or lot has the race of mankind in this, which is a special privilege of Israel? John’s reply to them is: ‘Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father.’ Why should God show His favour to men who are morally different from Abraham? God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

What does John the Baptist mean by this saying? We believe that he meant exactly and literally what he said. What he meant, then, was something like this: It is in the power of God to breathe the breath of life into these rocks of the desert; and it is conceivable they would be better men than you and worthier successors of Abraham, the friend of God. For who was, what was, this Abraham? If we turn to Hebrews xi. we read a Christian description of the man and his character: ‘By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise . . . for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.’ There are some good and devout Old Testament scholars who are inclined to question the historicity of Abraham, and to say that possibly he stands for a national idea, and a symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, rather than that he was an actual historical

character. We take a different view. It is possible that Israel did make of Abraham a symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, a grand idea, but there was a man to make the idea and the symbol possible. If we cast our eyes back along the line of history we see sitting in a tent by himself on the borders of an eastern desert one like an Arab chief of the present day. Compared with ourselves this Abraham understood little about the meaning of life, little about the Being of God; his was spiritual poverty indeed. Here is this Semitic nomad sitting thinking by himself: Is this the way to worship God? Must it always be by abomination, and cruelty, and lust? Is it all for greed of gain? Is God a kind of devil who must be placated? Is this religion, is this worship, is this righteousness? And as he ponders he resolves: I must leave this society, and I will try whether I cannot live out what I am feeling now. Abraham saw a vision and heard a voice; and by faith he went out, trusting only that the voice which had spoken to him in his prayers was one with the hand that should guide him. Momentous results followed that far-off choice. It was the dawning of a great hour, in which Israel was born, and with Israel the Messiah, and with the Messiah the gospel under which we live our lives to-day.

3. This, then, is the Abraham of whose seed these Pharisees claimed to be. They had not his moral courage, or his noble spirit; they were not of the kind who would have gone out in pursuit of a spiritual ideal. These were men who had hardened into insensibility, who by their lives denied the spiritual ideal Abraham had bequeathed to them, and therefore the Baptist's remonstrance was apt indeed: 'Think not to say, We have Abraham to our father.' As an illustration of what the fiery, indomitable prophet of the desert meant, we have the expression frequently upon our lips: 'His only recommendation is that he is his father's son.' Any worthless profligate who soils a noble name receives and deserves the reprobation of honest men. What you say about him is: This is no descendant of the noble dead; he has no right to bear the name. And this is what Jesus says to the indignant Jews who claimed Abraham as their father: 'If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.'

¶ All the great souls of history, God's called ones, can be put into the category in which

Jesus stood when He spoke those words. They are not always recognized as such, but our moral consciousness recognizes where they ought to be. All the rest of mankind must find a different category. Did these Pharisaic time-servers, these bigoted Jews who were questioning Jesus with the object of destroying Him, really think that they stood in the succession of him who was the friend of God? They did, but the consciousness of humanity since has put them right. We know now who are of the lineage of Abraham. An Anselm comes from the cloister to be Archbishop of Canterbury; he comes forth at the call of God. Reluctantly he turns his face away from that which had been his spiritual home, and takes up the duty thrust upon him by the importunity of a wicked king. The monarch and his aiders and abettors in wrong suppose that this weak man, this monk, whose business in life is to pray in a cloister, can be easily handled; they shall rule as they please in England, now that meekness sits on the throne of Augustine. But they reckoned wrongly; the strongest man on earth is the spiritual man. All alone, Anselm faced barbaric materialistic England and vanquished it. But yesterday, as it were, a William Tyndale, a George Wishart, a John Wycliffe, a Richard Baxter, taking not counsel with flesh and blood, came forth from what was, spiritually speaking, the house of their nativity, into an unknown and untried world, leaving comfort and preferment behind them; some of them to the martyr's death, all of them to suffering, ignominy, and shame. Do they need pity? By no means: these were of the seed of Abraham.

Listen to Jesus again. He is addressing a company of His own countrymen. His mother and His brethren seek Him at the door, and cannot come at Him for the press. He does not repudiate them, but He enlarges the family circle. Looking round at the simple men who sat about Him, peasant fishermen of Galilee, He said, 'Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.' The true seed of Abraham are these.

4. Look at this old Abraham again for a moment. See him sitting thinking, weighing well the question what was to be done with his life, and let us recognize—what is the very truth—that he had far less to guide him than

we have. He heard the same voice as we do, but it had not told the world as much, then, as it has told it since. Yet Jesus says: 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.' Abraham, in his lonely desert vigil, never saw Jesus; he had no foregleam of the day when Jesus should speak such words as these; but what he did have was the vision by which he saw the Sun of Righteousness arising in his own heart. That was Jesus' day. The Abraham who spent his early days in a guilty household, in the midst of men who never thought of the unworthiness of serving God by lascivious rites and brutal deeds, one day said to himself, 'This life has to be left behind.' So soon as he had seen that he had seen Jesus' day, and he rose up and went out to meet it. And that is just what we have to do.

Religion as Friendship

Is. xli. 8.—'Abraham my friend.'

SOME people may object that to speak of God as our Friend, and of ourselves as friends of God, is unworthy and all but irreverent. In reply we can only say that what is good enough for the Bible ought to be good enough for us. And the Bible does repeatedly use this description. It occurs both in the Old Testament and in the New. In a great chapter in Exodus, we are told that the Lord spoke to Moses face to face 'as a man speaks to his friend.' In the Second Book of Chronicles, in the prayer of Jehoshaphat, we come upon the phrase, 'the seed of Abraham thy friend.' And in the text the name is put in God's own lips: 'Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.'

The great New Testament passage for this subject is the fifteenth chapter of St John, that inner sanctuary. There in three successive verses the word comes back and back. It is used to explain the Cross: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' It casts light on Christian obedience: 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' And, then, it is chosen to indicate the deepest sort of knowledge of God's mind, a sort of knowledge we somehow share with Christ Himself: 'I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you.'

All of us understand the word friendship. We do not have to read the essays of Emerson or Bacon to learn what it is. If we have a friend, or if we have ever been a real friend, we know what friendship is. Robert Louis Stevenson, in his long fight with tuberculosis, was speaking out of his own deep experience when he wrote, 'so long as we are loved by others, I would almost say that we are indispensable; and no man is useless while he has a friend.' A man by himself is only half himself—his friends are the other half; they reflect his soul as in a mirror. So when we speak of religion as friendship we know what it means, and how real and how blessed it can be, uniting stimulus and stability, love, loyalty, confidence, companionship, and faith. It brings religion very near to us, makes it the most real thing in life, if we think of it as just a great friendship between God and the soul.

When we open the Bible, we find men living in intimate companionship with God—held to Him by a personal tie. That was what religion meant to them. They had friendly dealings with God. In discouragement, He was a Friend who helped; if defeated, He saved them from despair. They talked to Him and He heard; they trusted Him and were not disappointed. One misses that sense of intimacy with God to-day, no doubt because the picture of the universe as science paints it is emotionally so awe-inspiring. It seems more difficult to be friendly with God, but that is only seeming—He is as near, as real, as available to-day as ever. It was not a figure of poetry, but the actual fact, when Tennyson wrote: 'Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands and feet.' It is literally so, else our little lives would flash out like fire-flies and cease to be. The idea, so widespread to-day, that we are self-sufficient beings is a fiction. 'In him we live and move and have our being'; it is He who made us and keeps us in being, not we ourselves. No moment of day or night but His spirit touches ours; when we know this truth and begin to relate our lives to Him, religion becomes real and life a dearer, deeper thing.

¶ John Oliver Hobbes, in one of her stories, wrote these words: 'Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person: having neither to weigh thoughts nor to measure words, but pour them all right out just as they are, chaff and grain together, know-

ing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.'

1. It is this truth that makes *prayer*, if we know how to use it, simple, natural, and real—the talk of a man with his Friend. It ought not to be a problem but a pleasure. Who ever made an argument to prove that he might talk with his friend? Jesus did not argue about prayer; He prayed. Some souls do not pray from shyness, and others from sheer dumbness of spirit—but silence may be a sacrament between friends; words are not needed.

Many are troubled about prayer in our day, perhaps because they have lost the sense of God as Friend, as Horace Bushnell did at one time. But he carried on, praying to the next best thing, the abstract principle of right. It was a dreary devotion, but sincerely meant. If he could not address God as a known Person, he approached Him as an unknown Something. If he could not feel Him, he felt after Him. If he could not see Him, he looked in the direction where he conjectured He might be. At last the sky cleared and he recovered his lost sense of the Personality of God—a revelation broke upon him. Years later, to recover his health, Bushnell went to the Adirondack mountains for a rest. He was camping out with a friend, who tells of an evening incident: 'When it came time to get into our blankets, we had a few words from the New Testament, and I asked him to pray. He partly turned over on his face—we were both lying down—and began in his natural voice, but with a tone as soft and melodious as the low murmur of the stream beneath, what seemed for all the world like speaking to someone who was next to him but whom I could not see. And so he continued—till, when he ceased, I found every other feeling swallowed up in the thought that God was there. There was in his whole manner the vivid suggestion, the reflection of a long and dear acquaintance, fraught with precious memories between him and his Heavenly Father—as indeed there was.'¹

2. Again, if God is our friend, consider how black *sin* looks in the light of this relationship. We have been told that the modern man is not worrying about his sins at all. Carry that

over into everyday life and see how it looks there. What would we say of a man who came to neglect or deceive or hate or calumniate the kindest lifelong friend, and who, when the facts were pointed out to him, replied: 'Well, that doesn't worry me in the least'? What should we think of ourselves if we had done this? But we have done it. It is the very meaning of sin; the two things obviously in the same sense are base and mean violations of friendship. Sin is turning our back in scorn on all that God has been to us.

But there is more behind. If a man has a friend, and injures him, that is sufficiently bad, but what if he were to injure one of his children? There essentially is sin. If we are selfish, we are harming the life of others who belong to God. If we are envious and callous and unjust, we are striking at the happiness of those for whom He cares, and who ought to have been sacred to us on His account. The meanest and darkest and most hateful feature of the whole business of sinning lies in this, that it tramples the great Friendship down into the mire.

3. And does not this friendship make *forgiveness* easier to understand? 'The further I have gone in life,' writes R. L. Stevenson, 'the harder I have found it to understand what forgiveness means.' And yet, thank God, sin is pardoned.

If we were talking to someone who felt it all but impossible to take this in, we might well fall back on the analogy of God as the friend of sinners, and ask what other friends do. Most of us feel that the best friends we have ever had in this world are those who lived round us in the old home where childhood was spent. There was a mother there, or a father, who forgave our childish faults. We *experienced* pardon there, as between human friends.

But if love can do this, love on earth and between man and man, then how much more can love in heaven do it? We may argue straight from the best things in human life to the very heart of God. That is what Jesus did in the most wonderful story He ever told—the Parable of the Prodigal.

Here, then, is one great test and touchstone which we can apply to the friendship of God—He is willing to forgive. But in the background there is a test even greater—namely, willingness to suffer in order to bring about

¹ J. Fort Newton.

forgiveness, to make it possible. We may shrink pitifully from making it up with an old intimate who has wronged us, because of the bitter pain it will cost us to go seriously into the matter and have it out with him in explanation and appeal. And yet, if we were able to look back after accomplishing the reconciliation through whatever suffering of ours, how we should give thanks that we had been led that way. That inevitable suffering for forgiveness' sake was laid on God also, on Him most of all, and His response to the tragic need is Calvary. In Jesus' passion we see the pardoning agony of the Father.

What does it mean, this wood
So stained with blood,
This tree without a root
That bears such fruit,
This tree without a leaf
So leaved with grief?

Though fool, I cannot miss
The meaning this :
My sins' stupendous price
His sacrifice.
Where closest friendships end,
One friend ! My friend !

4. Once more, the friendship of God illumines our thought of *death*. When our friends die, we do not forget them. We retain them in our memory and in our love, and in desire we send our anticipations on to a good time coming when they and we shall be side by side again. It is more true of Christ even than of affectionate human hearts that when *His* friends die, He does not, He never will forget them. Through that power of His to which death is but a weak and empty shadow He undertakes that all whom He had chosen and who have chosen Him come to Him through the darkness, and that separation shall have an end. It becomes plain why immortality *must* be at the heart of the gospel. There is One who has taken us into an unchanging love, to which even death can make no difference. So that, when for us the hour strikes, and we lie down at last, it may be as if we heard the very voice of Christ : Ye are still My friends ; because I live, ye shall live also.¹

¶ They that love beyond the World cannot be separated by it.

¹ H. R. Mackintosh, *The Highway of God*, 75.

Death cannot kill what never dies.

Nor can Spirits ever be divided that love and live in the same Divine Principle ; the Root and the Record of their Friendship.

If Absence be not Death, neither is theirs.

Death is but Crossing the World, as Friends do the Seas ; They live in one another still.

For they must needs be present, that live and love in that which is Omnipresent.

In this Divine Glass, they see Face to Face ; and their Converse is Free as well as Pure.

This is the Comfort of Friends, that though they may be said to Die, yet their Friendship and Society are, in the best Sense, ever present, because Immortal.¹

Christian Courage

Is. xli. 10.—' Fear thou not ; for I am with thee.'

WE who name the name of Christ believe that in our Christian faith we have the secrets of such mastery of life, such self-control, and such great underlying convictions as may ensure courage in any circumstances whatever. Apart from faith there are great natural distinctions between men. Some are constitutionally courageous and others cowardly. Some are physically courageous while they are wanting in moral courage ; while in the case of others there is a strong development of moral courage in a weak framework of tingling nerves and shrinking flesh. Christianity has to work with men's constitutions as it finds them, so that there will always be great differences between the characters of individual Christians, but yet it refuses to accept such barriers as final. It professes to be able to overcome natural disabilities and defects of all sorts, and it stakes its truth upon its power

To make the coward spirit brave
And nerve the feeble arm for fight.

The first thing that strikes us in dealing with this subject is a difference between the ancient Hebrew and the modern British point of view, in respect of the fact that we have been in the habit of taking courage for granted while the Bible does not do so. The average British man or boy would be surprised and offended if any one were to say to him, ' Fear not.' He

¹ William Penn.

does not think of courage as part of his religion, but rather as a kind of fundamental pagan virtue bred in the bone and needing no fostering. The Hebrew, on the other hand, is continually being told not to be afraid. Newman has pointed out that this is 'a mode of address frequent in Scripture, as if man needed some such assurance to support him.' Yet when we begin to analyse ourselves, we shall be astonished to find how like we are to other people. We are all of us beset by dangers which only need to be realized in order to produce a strong impression. We are all cowards at one point or another; and it has been well said that the bravest men are such only in virtue of the fact that they can manage to be brave a quarter of an hour longer than other people.

¶ There is a characteristic story of British troops going into a cavalry charge. A young recruit, seeing the hand of the man next him shaking as it held the bridle rein, said to him, 'You have been in action often, surely you are not afraid.' The soldier answered, 'Man, if you were as frightened as I am you would run away.'

Now Christianity takes men where it finds them, and works upon the materials offered to it by their actual human nature. Among other things it takes up the rough natural virtue of courage, and baptizes it into the name of Christ. In doing this it transforms it, adding to it intelligence and reason, and so completely fortifying it with great convictions and emotions as to make it impregnable.

1. Our text gives as its reason for courage the man's fellowship with God. 'I will fear no evil, for thou art with me' is the soul's response to God's assurance 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.'

One of the finest passages in that most intimate and beautiful study of the human soul, Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, describes the experience of Marius in his young loneliness. The friends of his youth had died one after another. They had meant to him everything that had made life what it had been. And yet now amid the beauty of Italian scenery, and the scent of wayside roses, he became aware of a continued companionship at the very hour when life had seemed desolated. An unseen companion accompanied his way, 'no longer as but an occasional wayfarer beside him; but rather

as the unfailing "assistant," without whose inspiration and concurrence he could not breathe nor see.' This mysterious companionship gave him 'the sense of a friendly hand laid upon him amid the shadows of the world.'

That was the dawning consciousness of God upon a heart bred in paganism. Hetherington has said of the Scottish peasantry that 'they were trained from infancy to fear God, and fearing Him to have no other fear.' This consciousness of God is the essential element in religion. Instead of our being alone, there is ever another who seems to whisper, Thou and I. All the fears of life vanish before that high companionship. Responsibilities are no longer burdensome if in truth there be a God that worketh in us; and the fear of men is ludicrous if the God that made them is our friend.

2. This is a kind of courage which we can well understand. It is philosophically justified, and it is true to human experience. All the fears of life are quelled by a great love, and love is the only thing that can successfully cope with them. Fear ultimately resolves itself into a sense of our inadequacy and loneliness. There is no more pathetic spectacle than that of a solitary man pitting himself against the world. It is the sense of this that marks the difference between our moods of strength and weakness. In the former, things generally seem to be with us and on our side; while in the latter, everything seems either hostile or coldly alien. It is amazing how great a change the love of a friend or a little child will thus bring to the spirit. That other human being is but a mortal like ourselves, weak and incompetent as we are to face the sinister possibilities of life. Yet love is so wonderful a thing, and every touch of it so inspiring, that in the strength of a commanding human affection most of us are brave enough to face death or even to face life. There is some deep reason for this, and the reason must lie in the fact that although love is so personal and individual a passion, yet there is something universal in it too, and in its human tenderness it reveals a Divine presence. The secret of the universe is love, and those who love have the conviction that the universe is with them, not looking coldly on at their struggle, indifferent alike to their victory or their defeat, but somehow backing them, and assuring them of Divine support. There is all the difference in the world

here. Readers of Robert Browning will remember how in the adventure of Childe Roland,

The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay.

That is how Nature often seems to look on at our human struggle. But here is the great reversal. Instead of indifference we have found a universe that cares and knows. The onlooker is concerned in the struggle and is backing us to win. God says, 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.'

Thus the fear of evil, whether general or particular, is essentially an unbelieving thing. All weakening anxieties have their root in practical unbelief. It is the conviction of God and of His love that quenches fear, hiding us in the secret of His presence. And this conviction succeeds at the very points where other ways of courage fail. Sometimes we find men managing to be brave by deadening certain faculties or ignoring certain facts. An interesting instance of this is the well-known habit of Montaigne, who so constantly accustomed himself to the thought of death that he was able to say that he had entirely mastered his natural shrinking from it. It is courage by suppression at the best. But this highest courage suppresses nothing. It neither mutilates nor deadens human nature, nor does it require to ignore any facts, for it has an overwhelmingly greater fact to remember. Surely this must be the right way of living. We ought to win life's victories as whole men and women, with all our faculties alive, and all the facts in view. Side by side with God we can face the worst and go forward with a smile to meet anything in earth or hell without fear.

¶ A man worked hard for years to get money to build a house and furnish it, so that he could marry the woman of his choice. The great day had come and he started on his honeymoon feeling that the sun of his happiness had arisen in the heavens to stay there for ever. But at a certain station a telegram was handed him which read: 'Your home burned—a total loss.' He turned pale and his lips trembled. All the labour of those years gone in a moment! His wife looked over his shoulder, read the telegram, thought a moment, then looked into his face and smiled and said: 'Well, never mind, dear, we still have one another.'¹

¹ E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Mount*, 71.

3. Even for men in Old Testament times this was a tremendous secret of courage and success, but when Jesus Christ appeared, it, like all else that had helped man in his struggle, came to its own in Him. Nothing is more striking in the New Testament story than the continual evidence of the disciples gathering courage from His presence. Without Him they were easily terrified. 'It was dark, and Jesus was not yet come to them.' But the moment He came they were brave again. That was to a large extent due to their affection and trust in Him as their human friend; but even in their own experience, and before He died, we see it passing over into a sense of Divine Fellowship which they had in Him. God was somehow with them when they were in the company of Jesus. And so the two companionships were blended, human and Divine. After He had died the fellowship continued, and the early Christians never felt as if He were far away. Indeed, the very Cross on which He suffered became for them a kind of spiritual talisman, whose recollection made and kept their spirit brave. They feared not through all the wild days of the early persecutions, because He was with them. There is a quaint tale in the legends of King Arthur which tells of a Knoll of Change that had the power to transform cowards into brave men. The real Knoll of Change has proved to be the Hill of Calvary, and it has lost none of its power.

¶ Look back, for our example, to their courage, of whom, in the Church's youth, the world was not worthy. Try to conceive the strain of standing alone in the centre of the vast amphitheatre, in those minutes, perhaps, which were allowed to elapse before the beasts were let loose upon their victims; standing there ringed round with tier upon tier of scornful, hating, lustful faces; deafened by the derision and blasphemy of those with whom from childhood you have lived; waiting in utter isolation on the bare sand before that howling mob, to taste the bitterness of death. All your world is against you, the whole city thinks you mad. You have broken away from the wisdom and worship of the past, and rebelled against the common sense of the present; for reasons which are folly in the eyes of all that vast encircling crowd. For a love which only your own heart knows; for a voice which no one else has heard; for a hope which even you cannot conceive, you are going to make the utter, irrevocable sacrifice

of your life. Surely for such an act as this the soul must have laid aside every weight, and looked away from all that is not God; and in the certainty of an unfaltering gaze, the intensity of a single allegiance, must have known itself and Him.¹

There is but one difficulty in the way of this highest courage. There are some who are afraid of God more than they are of life. They fear danger, but they fear Jesus Christ more. It is the worst and most morbid form of fear, for it is nothing less than the personified fear of life itself. Conscience is in it, but Christ is the master of conscience, and His love is the one remedy against sin. Many elements are in it, different in each life and experience. But this is the supreme issue upon which all possibility of the highest courage depends, and one question alone really remains. Is the fact of Christ true, and true for men, or is it only make-believe and pious talk? It is well worth while to make the great experiment and ascertain. In the midst of this distracting and dangerous life, let us swing ourselves out over the abyss and trust to the everlasting arms. He is there indeed, and in Him is all that makes life worth living here or hereafter. Let us be no longer 'afraid to face the radiant wonder of life,' but take the risk and trust to the infinite love. Then we, too, will hear the voice that says 'Fear thou not, for I am with thee.'

The Help of God

Is. xli. 13.—'Fear not; I will help thee.'

1. PROFESSOR HUXLEY, addressing a meeting of students at Cambridge, used these words: 'I protest,' he says, 'that if some great Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer.' Now, there is something in that saying that we all appreciate who have lived long enough to mismanage our personal life. There is something, also, in the saying which sounds just and fair. It does seem quite a proper challenge to the Author of our being that somewhere and somehow we should all of us have access to guidance and assistance in the difficult matter of right

living. But when that eminent man went on to suggest that he was waiting, so to speak, for some invisible power to make him a good man, in the same sense as the pressure of a mainspring makes the hands of the clock go round, he was simply talking nonsense. It is nonsense, it is a contradiction in terms for a man to speak of becoming a good man by a process which begins by destroying his manhood. If a man could be made to think what is true and do what is right by the same kind of mechanism as moves a clock, with the same inevitableness, with the same blindness of all the parts to the entire proceeding, the result would be not a good man, but only a new kind of clock. For in order to be good a man must be aware; he must be alive. He must be responsive to suggestions, feeling the call of this and the fear of that, choosing his way. And what makes him good in the eyes of beholders and happy in his own soul is that all the time he might have gone by a different and contrary way.

¶ Jesus knew that we cannot have goodness unless the alternative is left open, and that we cannot love God unless we have the chance of forgetting Him. We cannot be religious unless we have the chance of being irreligious. We cannot live as children in our Father's house, merely because there is nowhere else to go. There must be the opportunity of the far country—though, remember, you can make a far country of your own doorstep.¹

2. Observe how Scripture never destroys the reasonableness and proportion of truth. How it acknowledges and honours the human personality even when, as so often, it is offering us the grace of God without measure. Observe how, too, in the midst of the very richest promise there is always a reminder to us that we have our part. 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' So spake Jesus. At the first hearing of the words they mean that God is waiting to give us the very thing we need. And that is, indeed, their meaning. But when we read again we perceive that this generosity of God towards us hangs upon a condition—a condition which we alone can fulfil. It is when we ask and seek and knock that the great and beautiful things reach us from God. So here:

¹ Bishop Paget.

¹ W. R. Maltby.

'I will help thee,' saith the Lord. The meaning is not, 'I will do this for you' in the sense in which we might say to someone, 'You sit there and watch me do this for you.' Still less do the words mean, 'Go you away and amuse yourself with other things, and when you come back you will find everything made good for you.' No; the words mean what they say—'I will help you'; 'we shall do it together.'

3. Now, this is the only kind of help we should look for from God, for when God helps us it is always part of His purpose, and the greater part, to make us better; it is always to give us the victory over some personal weakness or fault. But it is no part of God's intention to do things for us, we meanwhile remaining idle or even hostile. It is His part so to work upon us by the pressure of events and by the pressure of His spirit upon our personal moods that there may come upon us a strong willingness to take the holy way, the way which we know Christ would have taken in our circumstances. For the purpose of life is not that we get our own way. It would be nearer the truth to say that the purpose of life is that we shall not get our own way, until, indeed, our own way is the way of unselfish love. The purpose of life is that we become conformed to the likeness of the Son of Man. And this likeness is not something which is put upon us as we might put a mask upon our face, hiding our features, which remain the same. This likeness is something which we ourselves are to become, the happy sign in our face and in our voice that we have found a happy basis for our life, and are living on the bread and wine of God. We cannot claim that God has really helped us if we have merely had our own way. We cannot claim that God has helped us if all that has happened is that certain things which we had set our minds on have at last come within our reach. It would be nearer the truth to say that God had helped us when, after having set our hearts upon certain things, we should see them pass for ever beyond our reach, and yet to our own blessed amazement find that we are not at all bitter or envious.

It would be an easy thing, but most foolish, for a mother to spare her child and to spare herself many an anxious moment in the days when the child is learning to walk. Instead of allowing the child to set out upon his unsteady

limbs on the day when Nature signifies that she is ready, a mother might carry her child across the room and place him down at the other side. But the mother's object and the child's ambition are not that he shall arrive at the other side of the room, but that he shall walk to the other side of the room. It is not the result by itself which is of value. It is the process, and the result only as the crown of the process. Let us keep that illustration in view when we are thinking of how alone God is likely to help us. We have the authority of Jesus for believing that we shall never be far wrong in our thoughts about our Father in heaven if we keep close to all that is natural and instinctive, in the relations between a father and his child, still more in the relations between a mother and her child. All that a true mother will do for her child our Heavenly Father will do for us one by one. And everything that a true mother does for her child has, in her view and intention, one result, and that to help her child. It is not her aim to interpose herself between her child and the world of human experiences in such a way that the child will never become a man. It is her aim in everything that he shall be equipped for the battle in body, in mind, and in heart. She knows that she will have failed if she has, beyond a certain point, spared him from a certain element of rigour, for in that case she has really left him unprotected for the later tests of life. And therefore she lets him, as an infant, try his limbs and find his way to walk erectly, she remaining meanwhile not far off to set him swiftly on his feet again, to smooth away the pain of falling and the fear of setting out again. She will applaud every little triumph on the way to proper manhood, and give her own encouraging interpretation of the little misadventures by the way. As the Bible says of God towards us all, her 'gentleness will make him great.' Or, as the Bible says again, 'as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.'

¶ The motherly love of the penguin which smothers its offspring was not hers. She saw that mistaken concern illustrated in many a household which was a model of motherly care in the eyes of a blind world. The result of leading-strings and culture under glass was a feeble manhood and a silly womanhood, was failure of the most dire and dreadful kind.

Her little folks were treasures given to her to guard and protect, not to mould into her own image. They had personalities of their own, and inheritances of their own. They were individuals not appendages, and it was her duty, she thought, to enrich them by teaching them how to use their own talents and faculties. Hers was to provide an atmosphere for them to breathe, a purity for them to feel, a liberty for them to employ. She seemed to say: 'I am at hand to hold and to help you *if necessary*, but I want you to develop your own little selves so that when you are men and women you will be persons of a free will and not creatures of circumstance.' ¹

'Fear not; I will help thee,' saith the Lord. 'I will help thee.' That is to say, are we ready to begin, or, what is sometimes harder, to begin again? In that case we shall find that we are not alone.

The Servant of the Lord

Is. xlii. 1-4.—'Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.'

THE character and work of the Servant of the Lord is in some respects the most important subject with which Second Isaiah deals. It is not only very important. It is also on the one hand very interesting, and on the other very difficult. It is very interesting, because it is largely through the Servant that Jehovah brings about the salvation of Israel and of other nations, and the methods of the unchanging God must hold the utmost personal interest for His people of any period. It is very difficult, because the greatest care is needed in order to determine precisely who the Servant is; and only a close comparison of different passages where he is described can entitle us to any opinion on the matter.

1. The title 'Servant of the Lord' is applied by Second Isaiah first to Cyrus, the deliverer of the captives from the yoke of Babylon; but with the fall of Babylon Cyrus disappears from

the prophet's view, and there rises another figure whom he invests with the same title, one who has a great spiritual task to perform, instead of a military one. Chapter Forty-one contains the first mention of him: 'But thou Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend; thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.' The Servant, then, in this passage is Israel, the entire people whom the prophet is addressing. The Servant is not an individual. With us Westerners the unit of society is a single person, but in the East it is the family; and so the Old Testament is full of references to the nation, or to some part of it, when to Western ears it sounds as if an individual were meant.

2. The term 'Servant,' as applied to the nation, is used by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Second Isaiah takes the phrase and uses it in such a manner as to develop a great doctrine. In finding out what this is, it is necessary of course to compare the various passages in which the Servant is mentioned. A little attention shows that these resolve themselves into two sets—those in which God is spoken of as doing something for His Servant, and those in which the Servant does something for Him. And the significant thing is that the Servant of the one set is not identical with the Servant of the other; the Servant who in the former case is the whole nation becomes now that part of the nation which is really serviceable to God.

When the prophet is speaking of God's love for His Servant, His redeeming activity on the Servant's behalf, he naturally thinks of all his people, good and bad alike, all needing God, all dear to God. But when he is thinking of what the people ought to do for God, and recalls the great missionary purpose for which God selected Israel originally, and sought to train them all along, he cannot but feel that there are members who are morally incapable of doing that which they ought. He sees that the nation as a whole cannot at present be the Servant of the Lord in the full sense; and so when he is speaking of the activities of the Servant, he has to restrict the term to include only the pious kernel within the nation. Thus in the early verses of chap. xlii. it is this God-fearing heart

¹ J. Ramsay Macdonald, *Margaret Ethel Macdonald*, 130.

of the nation of which the prophet represents the Lord as speaking in such lofty terms; and in verse 6 it is expressly said, 'I will give thee for a covenant of the people,' that is, to be the medium of the restoration of the people Israel as a whole; and after that, 'for a light of the Gentiles.' Then from verse 18 onwards the prophet speaks in a very different tone, because he is now thinking of the inefficacy of the nation as a whole that ought to have been the Lord's servant. As he looks round upon the people he loves, and sees how very incomplete is their knowledge of God and their obedience to Him, their ignorance seems to him the veriest blindness to Divine things, and their disobedience deafness to the voice of the Lord. 'Hear ye deaf, and look ye blind, that ye may see. Who so blind as my servant—this chosen nation here? or deaf as the messenger that I send?'

¶ To no man was his Italy more really one than to that ardent son of hers, Mazzini, who loved every born Italian because he was an Italian, and counted none of the fragments of his unhappy country too petty or too corrupt to be included in the hope of her restoration. To his earliest imagination, it was the whole Italian seed who were ready for redemption, and would rise to achieve it at his summons. But when his summons came how few responded, and after the first struggles how fewer still remained! Mazzini himself has told us with breaking heart. The real Italy was but a handful of born Italians; at times it seemed to shrink to the prophet alone. From such a core the conscience indeed spread again, till the entire people was delivered from tyranny and from schism, and now every peasant and burgher from the Alps to Sicily understands what Italy means, and is proud to be an Italian. But for a time Mazzini and his few comrades stood alone. Others of their blood and speech were Piedmontese, Pope's men, Neapolitans—merchants, lawyers, scholars—or merely selfish and sensual. Mazzini and his remnant alone were Italians; they alone were Italy.¹

3. In the words of the text we have a very inspiring and very attractive description of the Servant, one who is able to serve his fellows wisely and well because he is first and foremost the Servant of the Lord. It has been beautifully said of the Servant of the Lord that he is

'useful only because he is used, influential only because he is influenced; victorious because he is obedient; learning the methods of his work by daily wakefulness to God's voice, a good speaker only because he is first a good listener, with no strength or courage but what God lends, and achieving all for God's glory.' 'Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.'

Now what are the characteristics of this Servant who knows that God's hands are about his spirit?

(1) One of the characteristics is *unobtrusiveness*.

He shall not cry nor be loud,
Nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

We must be careful not to misinterpret this. This is not the praise of silence. On the contrary, the description of the Servant suggests to us a prophet-preacher more than anything else. The writer himself depended upon language for the service he could do to man and for God; and for majesty and tenderness alike his words have never been surpassed. He is not likely, then, to disparage the gift of public speech. What he is thinking of is not so much the literal use of the voice as the method and manner of him who uses it. Matthew applies these words to Jesus with rare insight, when he says that Jesus charged those whom He had healed not to make Him known, and adds that this was a fulfilment of the words we have before us. Our Lord declined to be advertised in such a manner as would draw attention merely to His miraculous healing powers: much less would He advertise Himself.

Great forces generally work in silence, and we may take it as fairly axiomatic that the more noisy our religious efforts the weaker will they be. There is no room in religious work for excitement, though there may be ample scope for earnestness and enthusiasm. Self is the first demon that needs to be exorcised, and meekness the first necessity. If a man is forced to the front let him stand there and hold his ground in God's name, but let him never lift a finger to obtain the place for himself. In quietness and confidence is our strength. Our work may never be heard of on the lips of men; it may be carried on in poverty and disappointment and

¹ G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah*, ii. 276.

tears; it may show all the features which the world counts as those of failure; and yet for that very reason it may meet with the approval of the Master who did not strive nor cry.

And on the other hand, our work may show very large in statistics; we may command the ear of a crowd and the praise of men; but if it be known as our work, and if we are exalted by it, then it will scarcely win the approval of the Christ who humbled Himself, and would not lift up His voice in the streets. This does not mean that all our modern methods are vitiated with this taint, but the danger in them is great. Advertising is one of the great evils of the age, and when the spirit of advertisement enters religion the spirit of Christ departs. We have to do our work in faithfulness, patience, and humility, knowing that it is not our work but that of One greater than we.

How silently the great stars shine,
How silently the dawn comes in,
How silently in forest depths
The oak to massiveness doth win.

In stillness prayer finds deepest voice,
In stillness purpose comes to power,
In stillness faith and hope prevail,
In stillness love grows strong and pure.

The noblest powers are quiet all,
And He who comes the soul to greet,
He shall not strive, He shall not cry,
Nor shall His voice sound in the street.

(2) Another quality which will be conspicuous in the Servant who is taught of God is *gentleness*.

A bruised reed shall he not break off.
The dimly burning wick he will not quench.
He shall bring forth law faithfully.

This was precisely what the prophet did himself. The exiles were the bruised reed and dimly burning wick, and the keyword of the prophet's utterances is comfort. 'Comfort ye, my people, saith your God.' Bid them have faith in God and trust His faithfulness. When Israel as a whole had realized this, she would have the same story of love to tell to the nations, how that God made all men . . . that they should seek Him, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and

have our being. That is what the Servant of the Lord must make known to the Gentiles, how that all men have a Father in heaven, 'whose fondness goes far out beyond our dreams.' He is able to straighten and restore the reed bruised by sin, and to refresh with the supply of His love the wick of belief in goodness which is burning dim.

How characteristic of Jesus this was. If publicans and sinners were despairing of themselves, He assured them that He did not despair, and neither need they. And the common people heard Him gladly, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Here again He is the model for those who are Servants of the Lord to-day. Wherever we find those who are depressed because their life has been a failure in the sight of God, or those who hoped and strove to be so much more serviceable than they are in their particular line of life, or those to whom the world is hard in any way, with these we must be very gentle, and tell them of God whose gentleness makes men great. But our gentleness must never be mere softness. We must never forget that we are servants of an all-righteous God, and therefore we dare not offer comfort to one who will not part with sin. Whether he be a wreck of humanity, the miserable victim of his own vices, or a worldling who cares only for the things of this life, our first word to him from God must be, Repent.

Whoso hath anguish is not dead in sin,

Whoso hath pang of utterless desire.

Like as in smouldering flax which harbours
fire,

Red heat of conflagration may begin,

Melt that hard heart, burn out the dross within,

Permeate with glory the new man entire,

Crown him with fire, mould for his hands a
lyre

Of fiery strings to sound with those who win.

Anguish is anguish, yet potential bliss,

Pangs of desire are birth-throes of delight;

Those citizens felt such who walk in white,

And meet, but no more sunder, with a kiss;

Who fathom still-unfathomed mysteries,

And love, adore, rejoice, with all their might.¹

(3) *The reward of the Servant is that he shall succeed in the work of the Lord.* 'He shall not

¹ Christina G. Rossetti.

fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth : and the isles shall wait for his law.' 'He shall not fail nor be discouraged' unfortunately obscures the metaphor. The words mean literally, 'He shall not burn dimly like a wick, nor break like a reed, till he have set law in the earth.' We are reminded of the beatitude, 'Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.' But there is more than the assurance of God's protection : there is the guarantee of His strength, His sustaining power. If we are working for the salvation of others, no less than if we are working out our own, 'it is God that worketh in us both to will and to work according to His good pleasure.'

Bruised Reeds and Flickering Wicks

Is. xlii. 3.—'A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.'

1. THE words of the text refer in the first instance to the heathen world. 'This is the singularly humane and compassionate view the prophet takes of the Gentiles,' says Professor Davidson ; 'they are bruised reeds and expiring flames. . . . What the prophet may refer to is the human virtues, expiring among the nations, but not yet dead ; the sense of God, debased by idolatries, but not extinct ; the consciousness in the individual soul of its own worth and its capacities, and the glimmering ideal of a true life and a worthy activity almost crushed out by the grinding tyranny of rulers and the miseries entailed by their ambitions—this flickering light the Servant shall feed and blow into a flame.' So in all our dealings with the heathen world, and in seeking to convert men to the gospel of the Prince of Peace, we shall do well not to ignore the good in them if we would replace it by a better. We must not quench the smoking flax lest we find it impossible to light it again, or spurn the feeble efforts of unbelief lest we break the bruised reed.

2. But this missionary application of the words of the prophet is by no means the only one or the best. A further thought here is that Christ looks upon men with other eyes than ours ; that He sees good in them, and cherishes hope for them where we fail to do so ; and that all the good He finds in them He will use

for His own ends. There is something truly Divine and very consoling to our weak humanity in the invincible belief of Jesus that men are capable of being saved. In that belief He came into the world, and for it He suffered and died. Wherever there is a ruined life, a character lost, a soul blackened by sin, Christ sees not a castaway, but a bruised reed that may be straightened, and a smouldering wick that may be fanned into a flame. The sin that you do may cut you off from men, may drive you out of respectable houses, may make you an outlaw and a vagabond in this world, but it can never cut you off from the pity of Christ. He waits with a wondrous patience for the first spark of returning penitence, and He will fan it into the glow of a new and better life. When a woman that was a sinner made her way into the house where He sat at meat, and wept at His feet, He amazed all those present by the extraordinary gentleness of His dealing with her. He did not refer to the evil in her life. He did not, as other good men would have done, first cast her down, that He might afterwards lift her up. He simply took the impulse after good which she brought Him out of a life besmirched and tawdry, held it in His hands—a mere spark of virtue—and breathing on it, blessed it, and behold it was a flame, burning up the evil in her life, a lamp lighting her path along a new and hopeful way.

¶ 'Some months ago,' writes Dr Fosdick, 'I saw a moral failure, a downright moral failure, so thoroughgoing that he stood in imminent peril of the law and, so far as the facts that the eyes could see were concerned, there was no more chance that he could ever be anything except a failure. To-day, however, that man is distinctly not a failure. In these last few months he has staged one of the most splendid moral recoveries it has ever been my privilege to see, and the secret of it all was getting over to him Christ's way of looking at things.'

3. The same is true of those who are hard-pressed in the battle of life, of those who labour and are heavy-laden. Trouble can scotch but it cannot kill, and Christ is stronger than all the forces of this world. He will not add by the weight of a hair to the heavy burdens that men carry. His yoke is easy and His burden light. And men need, indeed, all the comfort they can get from Him in these days.

The struggle for life is a very bitter and desperate one for multitudes. For every one that is successful, many go to the wall. All the forces of the modern world are set against the weak and helpless—only the fittest survive. Troubles never come singly, and sometimes the rush and onset of them is so resistless that we are borne off our feet, and left stunned and bleeding by the wayside. Or they pass over us like a withering sirocco, and faith dies, and even the eternal flower of hope fades before their cruel heat. But He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. When we are most helpless He is most helpful. When life is at its lowest ebb His reviving power is at its best. When fortune has vanished, and health is impaired, and the spirit is broken, and the world frowns—then He can do His work, and bind up our bruises, and pour oil into our wounds, and give a new foundation to faith and kindle hope afresh.

¶ Christ delighteth to take up fallen bairns, and to mend broken brows; *binding up of wounds* is His office. I am glad Christ will get employment of His calling in you; many a whole soul is in heaven which was sicker than ye are; He is content ye lay broken arms and legs on His knee, that He may set them.¹

I could not see, for blinding tears,
The glories of the west:
A heavenly music filled my ears,
A heavenly peace my breast.
'Come unto Me, come unto Me—
All ye that labour, unto Me—
Ye heavy-laden, come to Me—
And I will give you rest.'²

4. And if it be but a faithless spirit from which we suffer, He shows the same tireless patience and the same restoring grace. There are multitudes of Christians whose lives are, comparatively speaking, wasted from an over-consciousness of their own weakness. They can never do any good; it is useless to look for fruits; Christian work is not in their line; they have enough to do with setting their own house in order. Besides, they are not sure of themselves; they hardly know what they believe. Their faith is not great enough to assure them that even they may become instruments in God's name. They forget the story

¹ Samuel Rutherford.

² Lewis Carroll.

of the widow's mite and the large and generous judgment of Christ, and because they cannot do much they will do nothing. For such it is a happy thing that Christ does not take men at their own valuation. He does not expect any of us to become good all in a moment. He knows what is in man, and is not disappointed with the feebleness of our efforts and the frailty of our faith. He will not snub our weak endeavours, but encourage them. When faith is very weak He will take us by the hand and gently guide our faltering steps. And when the flame of Divine life in us is faint and flickering, He will fan and cherish it till it grows bright and strong. 'The bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.'

Gentle and faithful, tyrannous and tender,

Ye that have known Him, is He sweet to know?

Softly He touches, for the reed is slender,
Wisely enkindles, for the flame is low.¹

Discouragement

Is. xlii. 4.—'He shall not fail nor be discouraged.'

1. In a hundred different ways discouragement of one kind or another thrusts its gloomy shadow across our path and chills our brightest days. Yet discouragement is one of the hardest things in the world to explain. Difficulty meets you squarely in the face, but discouragement haunts you. It is a kind of mental malaria, an insidious disease of the mind, sometimes chronic, sometimes acute, which poisons the will and paralyses its energies. That is what makes discouragement so often the vestibule of temptation. The discouraged man is the easily tempted man. He is ready to accept any relief, to take advantage of any open door that will deliver him from the intolerable pressure upon his spirit.

¶ In the old monasteries of Europe there was a species of mental or spiritual disease prevalent amongst the monks which was known by the name of *accidie*. It is an obsolete word now, although it still finds a place in our English dictionaries. In the Middle Ages this sin of *accidie* was so common that one of the fathers, Cassian, wrote an elaborate treatise upon it.

¹ F. W. H. Myers, *St Paul*.

What is *accidie*? Cassian defines it as heaviness or weariness of heart. The routine of the abbey, the lack of variety in its religious exercises tended to produce this spiritual despondency and listlessness. Although the word has become obsolete, the mood for which it stands has not become obsolete. It may wear a new garb and speak a new language, and yet it is essentially the same old evil which has always hung about the lives of men. Dr Workman tells us that he used often to warn the teachers in his training college against the *accidie* 'which, for them, would take the form of coming to the ceaseless round of educating youth with that poisonous attitude of mind which makes a man look forward to Friday afternoon at half-past four, when he can finish his school task for the week, take up his hat and be free until nine o'clock on Monday morning.' And, whatever our calling may be, there are probably few men who have reached middle age who do not know what it is to have to fight, as for their lives, against the oncoming sense of the futility of all effort.¹

There is, no doubt, a good deal of discouragement which is temperamental. Some people are born into the world at an angle at which they see everything under sable clouds. Enthusiasm of any kind depresses them. While they no doubt serve a good purpose in restraining the unbalanced enthusiasm of sanguine people, at the same time they have a good deal to answer for in the way of adding to the depression of the world. But the sanguine temperament brings its discouragements. It is also true that a good many of our discouragements are dyspeptic in their origin. A little open-air exercise will do more than a religious service to chase away our troubles. But the worst of this type of discouragement is that it is a contagious disease. Its germs scattered through a home or a church will poison the atmosphere and destroy all healthy joy and hopefulness.

¶ There are some people born with a gloomy strain in their composition. They are like the lone lorn creature in Dickens' romance *David Copperfield*, Mrs Gummidge by name, of whom it is said that 'she whimpered more sometimes than was comfortable for other parties and there were moments when it would have been more agreeable, I thought, if Mrs Gummidge had

had a convenient apartment of her own to retire to and had stopped there until her spirits revived.'

On the other hand, we must not forget—as indeed who can?—that there are a great many real discouragements in life which tax the faith and endurance of the bravest soul. There are, for example, the discouragements of business life. A man builds up for himself, after years of toil, a position of independence and integrity in the business world; then in a moment, by the dishonesty of some trusted employee or through the failure of some other concern, he finds his business in ruins around him, the years of toil gone for nothing, and he himself perhaps marked as a defaulter. There is no harder or more bitter experience, nothing that so tests a man's grit and grace.

¶ ¶ There is no more striking example of a business discouragement which was so overcome that it became a positive blessing than that of Sir Walter Scott. When, through the failure of his publishers, he found himself, at fifty-five years of age, a ruined man, with the savings of a lifetime and the home he had built gone, he wrote: 'I feel neither dishonoured nor broken down by the news I have received. I have walked my last in the domain which I have planted, sat for the last time in the halls I have built; but death would have taken them from me if misfortune had spared me.' He closes the letter by saying that discouragement is to him a tonic and a bracer. We know how that spirit conquered. From the magic pen of the great writer flowed that marvellous series of works, the profits of which not only bought back Abbotsford and enabled him to pay his creditors to the last penny, but created for him a deathless name in literature.

2. Discouragement may have its hidden blessings. It is not an unmitigated evil in life. It is a good thing for a man or woman to be thoroughly discouraged once in a while; and that for several reasons. First of all, because discouragement is an excellent discipline in *humility*. Uninterrupted success has the effect of making men self-conceited, self-assertive, and overbearing. But discouragement is the great antiseptic to all conceit.

Discouragements not only train us in humility, *they test and develop the will*. Our discouragements are a necessary part in the education of

¹ G. Jackson, in *The Methodist Recorder*, Sept. 3, 1931.

character. It is not enough to say that they are inevitable. The truest view is that which sees them as a necessity as well. Some men are like drums, you never hear of them until they are beaten. Discouragement enfranchises them in the roll of the world's great men. The greatest things in life—the great thoughts, the great discoveries, the great philanthropies—have been nurtured in sorrow, wrought out through discouragement, and finally established with smiles.

Yet, in order that this may be so, we must remember that it is one thing to have discouragements, but quite another thing to be discouraged. Every true soul has its discouragements, but no true soul is ever finally discouraged. How then are we to overcome our discouragements in life?

(1) Discouragement can never be to the man of faith a permanent condition. However dark the present moment may seem, in Christ there is a brighter day coming. Man's discouragements become God's opportunities to the soul that puts its trust in Him. A distinguished man of science once said that whenever in the course of his researches he encountered an apparently insuperable obstacle, he invariably found himself upon the brink of some new discovery. For every soul beset by discouragements there are the words of the Psalmist, 'Why art thou cast down, my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.'

(2) We ought to remember in hours of discouragement the things that encourage. Do not let us forever be looking at the debtor side of our life's balance-sheet, since however many our discouragements, our blessings are unnumbered, and thrown into clearer relief by these very discouragements. Some blessing in life that we had overlooked, perhaps cast aside, is called into activity and given a new meaning through some discouragement which God permits.

¶ 'Stevenson,' writes Dr James Reid, 'knew the crippling burden of ill-health. One of his most cheerful books was written when he was too ill to speak or write or even read. It was dictated to his wife on his fingers by the dumb alphabet. A critic who reviewed the book took the author to task for not knowing anything of the real depths of life's misfortunes! Steven-

son pointed out the actual facts, and the critic refused to believe that he could have been sincere. Whereupon Stevenson reflects that a misfortune nearly always seems worse to the man who is looking at it from without than to the man who is bearing it, because the spectator does not know the compensations.'

(3) And let us remember the blessed power that comes through prayer. Nothing so quickens the spirit of prayer as this feeling of discouragement. Prayer links us to Him in whose bright lexicon of duty there is no such word as 'fail.' 'He shall not fail nor be discouraged.' What a triumphant note of hope those words are! They proclaim the triumph of Christ's Kingdom on earth. From the human standpoint Christ did fail. In the world's judgment the Cross was the seal of His failure. Yet out of that symbol of defeat has proceeded the conquering spirit of mankind. Throughout all these ages we trace the power of that spirit which through defeat and ignominy has conquered every discouragement. It is good to feel that in this triumph over the world's discouragements Christ asks us to share. Be it ours, in the slow fulfilment of the Divine purpose, to do our part and lend our help, not discouraged because of the way, but stepping fearlessly through the night, knowing that

Out of the darkness of night
The world rolls into light.
It is daybreak everywhere.

The Missionary Servant

Is. xlii. 4.—'And the isles shall wait for his law.'

1. It would be better to translate this passage 'And for his teaching the far lands do wait.' The prophetic writer who is seeking to describe the mission of Israel, which was ultimately fulfilled in Christ, says that the heathen world is waiting for the knowledge of the true God. It is this mission which gives Israel its significance in the history of the world. There were nations that surpassed it in many of those qualities which make a people great, in culture, in power, in artistic genius. But why is it that our hearts are touched always as we think of that tiny people, with no special claim on our regard apart from this one thing? It is because we realize that it was chosen by God to fulfil the

greatest of all destinies, to be the channel along which God's self-revelation came to men, and in the fullness of time to give birth to Him in whom the supreme revelation of God was enshrined.

2. That, then, was the mission. And how was the fulfilment achieved? It came along many lines. First of all it came along the line of a great national history. When we open the Old Testament we find ourselves in the midst of a long national history which seems quite irrelevant to the purpose of revelation. At first we do not understand why so much space is taken up with relating what seems quite remote from a revelation of God's character and human duty. When we think more deeply about it we understand, as we never understood before, how true it is that God's ways are not as our ways, but higher and better. It was along this line, not that of conveying to us abstract propositions, not of giving us theological definitions, or of summing up for us in a few short and terse statements our duty to God and to our neighbour, that revelation primarily came. God struck with unexampled energy into the current of human life, entering into the experience of an elect people. The word became incarnate in a human history.

Sometimes revelation selected for its medium a great act of redemption, as when God freed His people from Egypt, or when He brought Sennacherib's threatened destruction of Jerusalem to nought, and thus saved for the world Israel's religion. Or it may come in great acts of judgment, as when God rooted out the northern nation and sent it into irretrievable captivity, or when later He visited Judah with political death, and banished the Jews from their home that in Babylonia they might repent of their sins and learn a higher truth they had as yet not known. Along these great national acts of God His primary revelation comes.

But revelation was not confined to this channel. It was disclosed in those sacred institutions in which Israel learnt to draw near to its God and realized that its God drew near in response. Or it might be in some vision in which a man saw God face to face, as Isaiah saw Him, and in that vision beheld not only the face of God, but his own heart in the light which streamed from God's holiness, and understood with an altogether new intensity of mean-

ing what it was to be a sinful man in the presence of a holy God. Or we may remind ourselves how it has slowly come to light in some great experience. Take, for example, the Book of Job. There must have come to this author some experience similar to that through which he represents his hero as passing. He must have known what it was to doubt to the foundations the morality of God, the righteousness of His government; he must have felt himself on the ruinous edge of utter unbelief. And then in some mystical vision of God, in which the scales fell from his eyes, he must have learnt that God was righteous, though he could not understand His action. If he could not fathom His designs or justify His methods, he was sure of God Himself, and knew that all must be well. And similarly we can trace the way in which Hosea through the tragedy in his own home rose to the conception that God was love. And all these channels through which the revelation of God flowed into Israel gradually led to a truer and worthier conception of God, of man's relation to Him and to his fellows.

3. And what was the revelation when it had thus been slowly built up? It was primarily a conception of God which stood far above what any other nation had been able to reach, so refined, so lofty, so spiritual, so ethical was the thought of God Israel had attained. They had laid hold of the great truth of His unity in contrast to the multitudinous gods of the heathen. They had learnt that Israel's God was supreme in Nature and in history, and that all the nations were, equally with themselves, under His righteous government. They had learnt that God must be holy, in contrast to the unclean and lustful deities whom the heathen worshipped. And as God was in holiness and righteousness, so it was held man must seek to become. We can trace the origin of these elevated thoughts and the way in which they gradually penetrated the consciousness of Israel till they became a permanent possession with which to enrich the world.

And yet with all Israel achieved there was much it failed to do. The Jews had learnt that Israel's God was supreme, and beside Him there was none else, but they had cancelled their monotheism by appropriating this God to themselves and looking on the heathen as

outsiders, or as vastly inferior to themselves, with a far slighter claim on God. National religion had to give place to a universal religion; race and sect had to count for nothing. These barriers had to be broken down, and only when all men were embraced in the circle of that religion could it be said that the religion of humanity, the final revelation of God, had come. And so while Christ recognized His continuity with the past, He rose sheer above it. He came as the supreme Revealer of God to men, who not only brought new truths and deeper truths, but achieved very much more. For just as it is important for us to remember that it is not the word which is uttered so much as the deed that is done, which constitutes revelation, so we have to remember that even in Christianity it is not the word that Jesus utters which is the greatest thing in the revelation; it is the Word that He is, the highest expression of the Father's nature and the Father's love, the incarnate Word brought down to our human measure and translated into our human tongue. But if His revelation was not exhausted in what He said, neither was it completed in what He was. The supreme deed He did—that was also the supreme revelation of God. It is a mistake to suppose that the chief element in revelation consists in the word which is uttered. It is in the redemption achieved on the Cross and in its glorious sequel, that we find the ultimate unveiling of God, His final judgment on sin, the secret of perfection, the pathway to blessed immortality.

4. But God, understanding all the weaknesses and needs of His people, did not simply accomplish the act of redemption, did not simply train the nation and reveal Himself to it; He has given to us in the Bible a permanent record to which we can at any time go back, and in which we can trace all the history of His love and His grace. And we can do it for ourselves. The Bible has been given to us not as the theologian's, but as the people's book; not as a book simply for the expert and specialist, but as a book for the lowliest and humblest Christian. There is much we can read, whether it is in Psalm or history, in Gospel or Epistle, that fills our hearts with joy and our souls with light. And as we read, we feel that we are in immediate contact with God Himself, that these words have the magical gift to lift the soul into

fellowship with God, where it is not possible for any power to intrude between the soul and Him. Here we are face to face with God, and as we read His Word, whatever may be the difficulties or perplexities that it creates, there is abundance in it upon which we can feed our souls, whereby we may know our duty and gain strength to do it.

¶ We are apt to forget that it is to the Jews that we owe one priceless treasure, the book of books, the Bible, in which scarce out of infancy we were taught to read, and which remains our chief comfort throughout life. In it the highest wisdom stands revealed in so noble a form, truth and poetry are blended together to such perfect harmony, the result is a masterpiece whose like no other literature in the whole world can match. Does not the finest work of all other great poets sink into insignificance beside the sublime utterances of the Hebrew prophets? In long, dark, dreary sleepless nights, I know not where such solace for weary souls may be found as in the magnificent imagery, the impassioned language of Isaiah and Jeremiah. All the sorrow and suffering of the human heart since the beginning of Time seem to cry aloud with their voice, and it were vain to seek help in other books of devotion, whilst the words of these grandest spirits are there, to speak for us and bring us more than earthly consolation. Surely none has ever steeped his soul in these writings, and not risen from their perusal strengthened and refreshed. We might do without all other books, provided only this one, the source of life, the Revelation of God to man, were left us.¹

5. Even in his own day the sympathetic spirit of this prophet caught vibrations in that heathen world, which told him of the longing and aching hearts and the groping hands that were stretched out to reach for God, for some Rock of Ages to which they could cling. And he knew that Israel had the true religion, so he says that the Servant will not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment, or, as we might better paraphrase it, the true religion, in the world. And for his teaching the far lands were even then already waiting. Centuries have passed away since he wrote, centuries stretching out into millenniums, and yet

¹ *From Memory's Shrine: The Reminiscences of Carmen Sylva (H.M. Queen Elizabeth of Roumania)*, 71.

there are multitudes in heathen lands of whom the same thing might be said. Their hearts are groping after God, and the Christian world has turned too often a deaf ear to their cry. And how are we to spread the light of that which is to us the greatest thing in life, the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ? We can only do it as we go out to these heathen peoples with intensified zeal and with doubled and trebled resources. We can only fulfil our duty and discharge our obligations both to Christ and our fellow-men as we take up with far greater earnestness the task of spreading this knowledge to the uttermost parts of the world.

¶ The fundamental fact about the human heart, in Augustine's great word, is that 'Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is not at rest until it rests in Thee.' Wherever we go we find that man is by nature a worshipper. Every form of faith, every system of doctrine, is an effort more or less faulty to express man's instinctive and inalienable sense of dependence upon the Unseen Power. In spite of the fact that the world lieth in darkness, largely by reason of its terrible mistakes about God. Above all other things in the world, the world needs the true doctrine of God. For God it clings to, like a child to its mother's breast, like the lungs to the air. And Christ came, supremely, to put the world finally right about the world's supreme need—to put it right, to tell it the truth, the world's one saving truth about God: that truth about God, apart from which it does not, and cannot, know the truth about man: that truth about the Divine Fatherhood which is the one hope and guarantee of human brotherhood; the one source and hope of peace between nation and nation.¹

A Clear Call

Is. xliii. 1.—'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.'

Is. xlv. 4.—'For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.'

Ezek. i. 3.—'The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.'

LET us at once dismiss from our mind the thought that these personal dealings of God

¹ H. E. Brierley, *Freedom and Faith*, 106.

were a miraculous feature restricted to the ancient world. He has never ceased to deal directly with His creatures. In the everlasting freshness and beauty of Nature we see this. To assure ourselves of His presence and working it is not necessary for us to go back to the garden of Eden, to the rainbow of Noah, to the harvest field of Boaz, to the starry firmament of the Psalmist. The flowers bloom, the rainbow glows, the birds sing, the corn ripens, the stars are bright and strong as in the ancient years. We see God working before our very eyes, and the confession starts from our lips, 'Lo! God is here.'

¶ 'As men watch the appearance of the sunset,' says Illingworth, 'thoughts and feelings arise in their hearts that move their being in unnumbered ways. Youth is fired with high ideals, age consoled with peaceful hopes, saints as they pray see heaven opened, sinners feel conscience deeply stirred. Mourners are comforted, weary ones rested, artists inspired, lovers united, worldlings purified and softened as they gaze. In a short half-hour all is over, the mechanical process has come to an end, the gold has melted into grey. But countless souls, meanwhile, have been soothed, and solaced, and uplifted by that evening benediction from the far-off sky.'

The Father of our spirits remains intimately nigh to humanity, leading, strengthening, protecting us as when in distant ages He made Himself known to prophets and apostles. He ever speaks out of heaven directly and authoritatively claiming our personal confidence, love, and obedience.

1. One great distinction between material things and living creatures is found in the individuality that belongs to the latter. We can think of all the water of the world as a unity; everywhere two streams, or more, will mingle and become one. We can think of all the rocks of the world as a single mass. But it is impossible to imagine a summed mass of even the lowest forms of life. Still less can we think the term humanity in the same corporate way. To matter belongs the idea of identity, mass; to men that of aloofness, independence, individuality.¹ In these texts we find examples of the Divine recognition of this individuality. The nationality of Israel is

¹ J. Y. Simpson, *The Spiritual Interpretation of Nature*.

viewed apart from all other nationalities; the personality of Cyrus and Ezekiel are made outstanding. We are all more or less conscious of this isolation. We remain apart from all others, and we know it. As the Russian proverb expresses it, 'Another man's soul is darkness.' The detachment is complete and inevitable. Despite the association of multiplied years we remain strangely ignorant of those we know best. 'In all the chief matters of life,' says Amiel in his Journal, 'we are alone; we dream alone; we suffer alone; we die alone.' 'We are all islands,' says George Eliot in one of her beautiful letters to Mrs Bray; 'each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe; our hermit spirits dwell and roam apart.' Souls are more solitary than stars. And yet we contrive to deaden the sense of individuality when we cannot destroy it. In effect we lose ourselves in the crowd. As in the doctrine of pantheism a vague impersonal element is substituted for the personality of Deity, so there is a panhumanism in which our individuality is lost in a vague sense of the infinity of numbers.

But there comes a time in every man's life when he awakes with a shock to the fact of his individuality, and to the claims of the higher life. From our earliest days we have a general sense of spiritual relation and obligation, although it may be faint because obscured by the excitements, interests, and pleasures of the world. One day, however, the call is heard that resolves the nebulous feeling into a definite sense of immediate duty. 'I have called thee by name.' Literally, 'I have called out thy name.' One by one we are called to a new life, one larger, deeper, purer, worthier. With a start we hear our name, we are differentiated from the crowd, we realize our relation to the eternal world as never before. The solemn confession of the Psalmist becomes ours, 'Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.' There is no mistaking the Divine voice calling us to Himself. Milton writes of 'airy tongues that syllable men's names on sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses,' but the voice that calls us to a godly life commands the soul and cannot be mistaken. Whether we respond to it or not, it is one of the greatest facts in our history; we can never forget it, and we can never again be as if we had not heard it.

2. It is in the most varied circumstances that we become alive to the call of God. Very frequently the eyes of men are opened to the unsatisfying character of earthly things whilst they have the most of them, and they are warned to look higher. Prosperity drops his mask and is known to be a phantom; his treasures are seen to be shadows, not substantial things. Hall Caine tells that in his early life, in his moods of depression, he was strengthened by the hopefulness and courage of Rossetti, not only in the 'despondency of failure,' but in the 'no less real despondency of success.' Yes, there are strange days when successful men feel acutely the mockery of wealth, the forsakenness of popularity, the insipidity of luxury.

¶ In Lord Broughton's *Recollections of a Long Life*, we find Lord Byron writing thus after a tour in Switzerland: 'In the weather for this tour I have been very fortunate—fortunate in a companion, fortunate in our prospects. I was disposed to be pleased. I am a lover of Nature and an admirer of beauty. I can bear fatigue and welcome privation, and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. But in all this the recollection of bitterness, and more especially of recent and more home desolation which must accompany me through life, have preyed upon me here; and neither the music of the shepherd, the crashing of the avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the glacier, the forest nor the clouds have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the glory, around, above, and beneath me.'

'The word of the Lord' comes to others, as it came to Ezekiel, in far different circumstances. 'As I was among the captives the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.' Exile, humiliation, and suffering brought him to understand the large part that heaven plays in the affairs of men, and that it is to God we must look in dark days for light and strength, for consolation and hope. Henry Thomas Buckle, author of *The History of Civilization*, was not particularly inclined to religious faith, yet on the death of his mother, to whom he was passionately devoted, he became absorbed by the doctrine of the soul's immortality. 'Methinks, that in that moment of desolation the best of us would succumb, but for the deep conviction that all is not really over; that we

have as yet seen only a part; and that something remains behind. Why is it that at these times our minds are thrown back on themselves, and being so thrown, have a forecast of another and a higher state? When Pasteur lost loved children he wrote: 'My philosophy is of the heart and not of the mind, and I give myself up, for instance, to those feelings about eternity which come naturally at the bedside of a cherished child drawing its last breath. At those supreme moments, there is something in the depths of our souls which tells us that the world may be more than a mere combination of phenomena proper to a mechanical equilibrium, brought out of the chaos of the elements simply through the gradual action of the forces of matter.' So the tragedies of life and death call us to solemn considerations which at other times we neglect; the heavens are opened, and men see visions of God.

But oftener than at any other time the Divine call comes to us, as it came to Samuel, in the days of youth. In later life the appeal from above is made more generally to the conscience, and through struggle, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, we enter the Kingdom; but in youth the appeal is rather to the heart. Christiana receives a letter brought from her husband's King. 'So she took it and opened it, but it smelt after the manner of the best perfume; also it was written in letters of gold.' A love-letter, not a death warrant, is the dynamic this time. So does God seek to win us in life's morning. 'My son, give me thine heart.' And to those who, hearing, yield, however long life's day may prove, it will grow in brightness to the end.

Master, speak! and make me ready,

When Thy voice is truly heard,

With obedience glad and steady

Still to follow every word.

I am listening, Lord, for Thee;

Master, speak! O speak to me!

The Comfort of His Presence

Is. xliii. 2.—'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.'

At the moment when these words were originally spoken Israel stood at the beginning of a new chapter in her history. The captives in

Babylon were waiting within the walls for the gates of brass to be thrown open that they might take their journey towards a home none of them had ever seen, though they had all been taught to love it and reverence its sacred associations. This preacher has just been telling them that they are to have a unique vocation in the making of the future; they are to be a holy people, a church (as we should now understand it) rather than a nation, a spiritual light centre. 'Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen.' This is what they have been prepared for; this is why they have had to suffer. And he goes on to tell them that they will have to suffer still. He does not promise them an earthly paradise; the very greatness of their destiny will expose them to intense suffering in the future as in the immediate past, but they will never be utterly destroyed. 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.' Babylon is not to be their only discipline nor Cyrus their only deliverer.

And how true to the facts this prophecy has been! Of no other nation could the same thing be said. Alone among the ancient peoples with whom she had dealings Israel has preserved her identity until the present hour, but she is homeless, scattered abroad on the face of the earth. We owe to her our vision of God, our Bible, our Christ; but the price she has had to pay for being God's instrument to this high end has been that of passing through waters of sorrow and rivers of woe from generation to generation.

This figure of the waters as a synonym for trouble and sorrow is a favourite with Old Testament writers, and is employed in some of the noblest passages. Thus in Psalm lxix.: 'Save me, O God; for the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me.' Or take that cry of pain in the seventh verse of the Forty-second Psalm: 'Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.' Of course the figure is often employed in an entirely opposite sense, to signify the refreshing grace of God in the soul, as in the first verse of this very Psalm: 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.' A

similarly beautiful use of the word is the familiar passage in the Thirty-fifth of Isaiah: 'In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.' There is never any danger of confounding the two; indeed, we use the word water in both senses ourselves. The limpid rippling stream is one thing; the dark and troubled ocean is another.

2. Without straining in any way the meaning of the text we are entitled to appropriate it to our individual experience. It is a promise based on a principle which can be traced throughout all stages of the spiritual progress of mankind, the principle that suffering is a condition of the ascent of the soul, and, in some form or other, an accompaniment of all high and holy service. If we are to judge from the experience of the saints and saviours of the past, and especially of our Lord Jesus Himself, God has never promised in this world exemption from pain. He has promised something better. His words are: 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.'

Now, it is all very well to assure a man that God is with him in some hour of trouble or suffering, but if he himself is not conscious of it there does not seem much value in the assurance. And no small part of human sorrow is of this kind; we feel isolated, unsupported, left to ourselves. It would make all the difference if we could only be vividly conscious of the unseen Presence—in fact, if that were bestowed there would not be much left to trouble about.

A modern diver can descend to deeper depths beneath the surface of the ocean than were probably ever explored in olden times or could be explored now without a proper scientific equipment. He goes down in a diver's dress, provided with air-tubes which are kept constantly replenished from a vessel waiting above, so that he can breathe as easily on the ocean bed as though he were walking about under the open sky. His dress is also a defence against sudden attack, and his comrades above are constantly on the alert to come to his rescue should he be taken unawares by any of the numerous dangers to which he may be exposed in the darkness of an element to which he does

not properly belong. He knows he is not alone; he is in unbroken communication with his watchful helpers in the bright world above; so, though in the course of his work in a region where he can neither see nor hear anything of the sights and sounds of that higher world, and though he is liable at any moment to be attacked by horrid foes or to be gripped and held fast in the midst of some scene of death and corruption, he can afford to feel perfectly secure; he will not be allowed to perish. If, as occasionally happens, through some accident his communications become entangled and he loses consciousness, he is still protected; his waiting friends know of it immediately, and he is borne to the surface in safety.

The Christian's relationship to God is much like that. We may be plunged beneath dark waters in the course of our service of the Divine wisdom and love, and there we may have to encounter many terrible things; but if we are encased in the armour of God we are as safe as though we were in heaven itself. If by prayer and faith we preserve unhindered intercourse with the source of all goodness and truth, we are breathing an atmosphere in which nothing can harm us; and if, in some hour of special trial in which we seem to lose the full consciousness of the comforting presence of our heavenly Father, this will not mean that He has left us to our fate—far otherwise indeed. He will descend in power into the very midst of our tribulations and, with a mighty hand, bear us through them in triumph, and set us far above them and out of their reach. 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee.'

¶ When we are cast into some burning fiery furnace seven times heated, we are not alone, never alone; but there is One beside us, like unto the Son of God. When our feet slip upon the slimy stones in the swelling of Jordan, a hand leaps out and catches us and steadies us. 'I will not leave you comfortless,' said Christ. Nor does He. There is a Presence with us, a Comforter, a Fortifier who does strengthen, does uphold, does bring us through somehow from hour to hour and day to day. Pusey once wrote that when his wife died, he felt 'as if the rushing waters were up to my chin; but underneath the chin there is a hand, supporting it.'¹

¹ A. J. Gossip, *The Hero in Thy Soul*, 112.

3. The second clause of the text makes use of a different figure—‘and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.’ Our way in life may lead through many a river of difficulty and distress which would engulf us if we tried to cross it alone. But why should we try? Our heavenly Father will not abandon us; our Elder Brother will be by our side. It must needs be that we meet with pain, and trial, and loss, and disappointment, but never let them deprive us of our confidence in the love of God. There is a purpose in the discipline; it is to call forth in us those qualities of mind and heart which are never found save in association with the Cross. You will have tribulation, Christ conceded, more than most folk, if you are really Mine. For if sorrow comes as discipline, it also comes as a reward. If a branch of the Vine bears fruit, and just because of that, the Husbandman will prune it, cutting it back to the raw quick, that it may bear more fruit. So thankfully did He accept the trials and the sorenesses of His own life. You will have tribulation, beyond doubt, but God will give you all you need to face it, bear it, see it through.

Perhaps there is a deeper purpose still, but no finite wisdom can fathom it. No one can reflect on the subject of the world’s pain without feeling that there is something behind the utmost that has ever been said about it. All one can say is that the highest joy is somehow dependent upon acquaintance with it. If the Christ we adore had never had a Calvary we should feel that the mystery of life was absolutely baffling; as it is we have learned to sing our sweetest songs to Him who said: ‘I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore and have the keys of hell and of death.’

¶ One of the finest types of missionaries lived and laboured in the south of India, and amid the multitude of things which fell to his lot to do was to tear down a leper’s house. While on furlough, leprosy developed. At first he was stunned, his faith tottered and came near falling. Why had God allowed this to come upon him? To him in the prime of life and dedicated to a task that needed him? But his faith righted itself, saw through the gloom. He got hold of what is the spiritual counterpart of the new invention called an ‘All-weather sextant,’ an invention by which the sun can be seen by the

mariner no matter what clouds or mists may hide it. He took this spiritual ‘All-weather sextant’ and saw God’s face through the clouds. Isolated from man, God seemed nearer. Friends visited him in his isolation to learn from him the way to live. For he had found the way to live—‘in spite of.’ But one friend came from India with pity in his heart and showed by the tone of his voice that he was pitying him. The leper stopped him: ‘You are feeling sorry for me, and you must not do it. I have never known deeper joy in my life. These walls are radiant with the love of God.’¹

In the bitter waves of woe,
Beaten and tossed about
By the sullen winds that blow
From the desolate shores of doubt,
Where the anchors that faith has cast
Are dragging in the gale,
I am holding, holding fast
To the things that cannot fail.

In the darkest night of the year,
When the stars have all gone out,
I know that I dare not fear,
That faith is better than doubt;
And fierce though the fiends may fight,
And long though the angels hide,
I know that truth and right
Have the Universe on their side;
And that somewhere beyond the stars
Is a Love that is better than Fate:
When the night unlocks her bars
I shall see him—and I will wait.

The Return to God

Is. xliii. 5, 6.—‘I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back.’

1. THERE were many dispersions of the Hebrew people; wave after wave of human life was carried from Zion into alien lands. They were always going away, and no one ever came back. It was a land from which men in search of security might well escape. Armies were never far from its threshold; it lay, as other little nations lie, across the path of restless Empires, and there was no peace. And every new in-

¹ E. Stanley Jones, *Christ and Human Suffering*, 130.

vasion or threat of invasion meant a new scattering. Sometimes their nobles and chosen sons were deported by the conqueror to Babylon or Persia; sometimes they left of their own free will to trade in other lands. Of all such dispersions the best-known is the Exile in Babylon, but it was only one among many.

To the prophet pondering over this agony of a nation, slowly ebbing from the land which was the very symbol of their faith, there came this revelation of another movement, which would come to pass: he beheld by faith a return to Zion from the four winds of heaven. This hope was not for him a deduction from his political insight. It was a venture upon the character of God. If God were all that the prophet believed, and if Zion meant for Him all that faith claimed, then certain things must follow. God could not rest and they could not rest till once more, in the City of His love, they met, the Redeemer with His people.

And because the prophet believed God, and did not shrink from the venture of faith, he speaks more greatly than he knew. His words tell us of another trek homeward into the City of God. This is the greatness of such a prophet—to take the ebbing and flowing of an Eastern tribe and so to read these things that they are charged with a meaning for all peoples in all ages.

2. Men are always going away from God, and they are always being drawn back to Him. There is in every age and in every life this ebb and flow. On the same road the son who has gathered all together and is bound for the far country is passing the poor wanderer returning in rags but with his face set to his Father's house. On the same way the exiles are departing and the ransomed are coming back. They leave Him; but He has issued His word to the North, 'Give up,' and to the South, 'Keep not back.' They are not movements which alternate, as though in one age men turn to God and in another depart from Him. They are not even movements which clearly divide the children of men into two streams, some with their faces away from God, some steadfastly looking to Him. The tragedy of our life is that both may be proceeding at the same time in one breast. That is why we have no peace.

¶ I have sometimes, in looking back on the doubts and questionings of this period, thought

and perhaps even spoken of myself as an infidel. But an infidel I assuredly was not: my belief was at least as real as my incredulity, and had, I am inclined to think, a much deeper seat in my mind. But, wavering between the two extremes—now a believer, and now a sceptic—the belief usually exhibiting itself as a strongly-based instinct, the scepticism as the result of some intellectual process—I lived on for years in a sort of uneasy, see-saw condition, without any middle ground between the two extremes, on which I could at once reason and believe.¹

If there were one movement, the story of humanity would be plain. If mankind were steadily leaving the thought of God out of its reckonings, so that with each age there is less place for Him, its records would be so far intelligible. Certain thinkers have taken in hand to read our history in this way, as a gradual emancipation from the dreams and the fears of our childhood. God belonged to the infancy of the race; slowly but steadily, though with some relapses, man has left behind the illusions of his early days; he no longer cherishes its hopes, nor is he held back by its commandments; he has forsaken his Zion and he will not go back. If this were all, the story would have a certain simplicity in it. It is true that this would be the simplicity of a disease which leads its victim every day nearer to death. But at least there would be unity. Zion would be left a ruined city, witnessing only to the illusions which nerved mankind through the days of youth, but now it can put away God with other childish things. So man would have to live in a world without God and without hope, making the best of things.

Or if the story could be read as a continuous movement towards God, it would make sense. There have been some who have tried so to read it. Life for the human family is one long procession through the outer courts of the Temple of the Universe into the Holy of Holies. Our face is always set to Zion, and we shall find it inevitably; only let the process be continued and the End will be reached. For them the human story is one of a ceaseless, unbroken, undeviating return to God, from whom we came. This, too, would be simple. But does it do justice to the facts?

To those who look at it steadily the human

¹ Hugh Miller, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, xvii.

scene presents a picture not of unity but of confusion. It is like a place where two tides meet with clouds of foam and the sound of many waters. It is this clash which gives to life the characteristic quality upon which all the tragic poets and inspired seers have fastened. It is the utterly incalculable factor to be found in the human will that stands out in any faithful rendering of human things. Man is a tragic being for the very reason that he cannot be said either to have turned from God or to have turned to Him with all his heart.

He may determine to leave out God from his reckonings; he may seek to build up his own life, or even the life of his tribe, upon the creed that there is no God. But is this a practicable scheme? Many a man, and some nations, have found that it breaks down. All is settled, it seems, and then some word is brought to the soul, and the whole process is thrown again into confusion. All the old questions are reopened. Nothing is settled after all. In the secret recesses of memory there are stirrings which can never be stilled. The daily happenings of life bring messages from this forgotten God. He signals from the midnight sky; He draws near when love comes; every little child is a preacher of His; sorrow, loss, death, whisper to men of Him. There is always a movement, however feeble, towards Him. Man is never able to forget God or to lose the pull of His love. 'If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall guide me.'

3. We have not far to go for signs in these days of the confusion in human life. Wherever men face the facts of the hour they find themselves in a place where the tides clash. Mankind cannot forget its hope of a golden day; and yet it cannot, or will not, forsake the ways which lead from that hope. It will neither turn wholly from the City of God nor wholly towards it. There is chaos everywhere, and men ask eagerly: 'Which way will the peoples of the world take?' They inquire of every seer, 'Is it night or day?' They know that there is twilight, but which twilight?

By faith alone can we be sure that man has not escaped from the constraint of the Divine love, nor will things present nor things to come part him from that love. But what

is to happen immediately ahead we cannot foretell by any examination of the facts. Our hope and faith must rest on the character and action and purpose of God. We behold God in Christ by faith, not as One who waits till men shall come to Him, indifferent whether they come or not. It is not in such a God we have believed, who have seen Him in the face of Jesus Christ. He is a God who seeks and draws men; His throne is the centre of Redeeming Love, which like a great magnet draws men to Him. He does not wait till His children come to Him; He goes forth to seek them; He stands at the door and knocks. He is not only on the throne, He is on the way; He *is* Himself the Way. This is the God in whom is our faith; only this God can be justly called the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. If this is God, there *must* be a return to Him. And yet His purpose would not be completed if we were drawn back to Him by a mighty hand which would overmaster all other powers. He cannot have His purpose unless man is free to depart and free to return. That is the meaning of His Cross. 'How often would I have gathered thee, but thou wouldest not!' Our faith is in the drawing power of a love which will not and cannot use the weapons of coercion. It is Love in all its Divine weakness; it is Love, seeking, redeeming, drawing mankind to itself.

¶ Gordon Darnaway, the old sea-captain, turned farmer, says in Stevenson's story:¹ 'At the hinder end, the Lord will triumph; I dinna misdoobt that. But here on earth, even silly men-folk daur Him to His face.'

At the Cross we see the meeting of the tides; on the one hand the set of the world away from God—'we will not have this man to reign over us'—and on the other the call to return, and the way of the return laid bare and clear. In the Cross we see the daring purpose of the story, and we see how alone that purpose can be fulfilled. We see dimly, but still we see, why it is that man must be suffered to turn away from God, and how alone he can be drawn back. Because we believe in God we do not know of necessity what is to happen in the next generation, but we know that at the last there can be but one end: the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come to

¹ *The Merry Men*.

Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

Meanwhile, in the centre of human life the call has been sounded for those who will to return. The vision has been set before us of that grace which draws the heart to Him; the nameless longings of our soul are named, when we see Him; we are exposed to the power of His grace, and we find when we turn our feet towards Him, that weak and faltering as they may be, they still draw nearer to Him, *for the Way is a moving way.*

¶ There is an incident in the history of Scotland which has strangely touched the hearts of the Highland people for wellnigh two hundred years. It has to do with the landing of Charles Stuart in 1745 and the rallying of the chieftains to his standard. It is related of one Lochiel that he had no faith in the enterprise, and that he told his brother that he would go and remonstrate with the prince and try to dissuade him from his purpose. His brother, however, replied, 'Go not near the prince, for so fascinating is the power of his person, that he will toss your mind like a feather in the wind and you will not be able to do as you desire.' Lochiel, however, would not be dissuaded. He went and expostulated with the prince, who listened with silent patience, and then replied: 'My father has often told me in days gone by how Lochiel deals gallant blows for the king, and to-morrow the standard will be raised, and you, within the shelter of your home, will learn of the fortune or fate of your prince.' Then the aged chieftain, deeply moved, arose and said, 'To-morrow the standard will be raised, and I will be there and every man of my clan will pour out, if need be, the last drop of his blood for the prince.'¹

The Unity of God

Is. xliii. 10.—'Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.'

Is. xlv. 5.—'I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.'

1. THE belief in God, the sense of God, is intuitive, instinctive, universal. Man has never to argue himself into belief in the existence of God; he has only to argue himself into a *denial* of His existence. As soon as he wakes

to conscious life, man finds himself in the presence of things, events, happenings which make him feel that there is outside of himself some mighty Other, some Power vastly stronger and greater than himself. His conceptions of this Power not himself may, and do, vary vastly in dignity and purity. But the worship by the savage of his fetish is as valid a witness to the reality of the instinct for God as our Christian worship. The Bible advances no proof for the existence of God. It takes it for granted.

But it is one thing to be sure that there is a God; it is another and a different thing to know what God is like. There has been a long history of the race's apprehension of the nature of God. Behind our present-day knowledge of God there lie ages of searching and striving, of guessing and blind groping after Him. If we live to-day in the broad light of noon, before us there were men who lived in the morning twilight and the dim dawn, and others who lived in a night only illumined by the faint glimmer of the stars. The race's knowledge of God has grown from more to more, and every fresh discovery of God's nature has meant moral and spiritual uplift for the world—for a race's standards and ideals are ultimately determined by the nature of the God it worships.

In the beginning of things, men believed in a multitude of gods. Each clan, each tribe, each city had its own special deity. These gods were like petty princelings, for their power was limited to their own clan or tribe or city, and beyond such clan or tribe or city their writ did not run. The ancient Greeks, for example, peopled the world with gods. They gave every tree and river and spring its deity. They pictured the greater gods as dwelling in Olympus, and, although Zeus was considered to be in some fashion king of the gods, yet each god had his own special and peculiar sphere of influence, and each went his own sweet way. In Greek story, gods and goddesses are represented as intervening in the affairs of men. They take sides in human quarrels. In the Homeric hymns, for example, Hera and Pallas Athene are represented as using their power on the side of the Greeks, and Aphrodite as using hers on the side of the Trojans. Now, it needs no pointing out that so long as people believed in gods many, gods oftentimes at variance amongst themselves, there could be no real

¹ J. W. Derwent.

belief in plan or purpose in the life of the world. A Pantheon is inconsistent with any real faith in Providence. Polytheism gives men not a cosmos, but a chaos.

2. Even among the Jews, who in the matter of religion have been the supreme teachers of our race, the idea that God was One and that He was the God of the whole earth took long years in coming to birth. The Jews were henotheists long before they were monotheists. That is to say, they limited their worship to one God—Jehovah—long before they realized that Jehovah was the only God. At first Jehovah was just the Hebrew God, a local and tribal deity whose sphere of influence was limited to the tribe that worshipped Him. When Jacob fled for his life he thought he was leaving his father's God behind. He was taken wholly by surprise when he found that God was still near him though he had wandered far from his father's tents. 'Surely,' he said, when he awoke out of his sleep, 'the Lord was in this place and I knew it not.' The popular idea of God as being local and limited is illustrated in the excuse the servants of Benhadad, the Syrian king, advanced for the defeat of his troops at the hands of the people of Northern Israel. 'Their gods,' they said, 'are gods of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight them in the plain and surely we shall be stronger than they.' And that the idea of local and limited gods was not confined to what we call pagan peoples, but was shared by the Hebrews themselves, is proved by what King Ahaz did after his defeat by the king of Syria. He sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him, and said, 'Because the gods of the Syrians help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me.' While the Hebrews regarded Jehovah as their own special God, and gave some sort of obedience to the command, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' that did not prevent them from thinking that there were many other gods beside Jehovah, and that these other gods had authority and power amongst other peoples.

It was a tremendous day when it flashed upon the mind of the seer that Jehovah was the God of the whole earth—not only of Canaan, but of the world—and that all the gods of the nations were idols, mere blocks of wood and stone, dead and inert things, possessed of no

power or authority, possessed, indeed, of no real existence. The prophet brushes aside the mob of deities wherewith other nations peopled the earth—brushed them aside with a certain intellectual scorn—they were nothing, he said, but the work of the smith and the carpenter—and claims the whole place for God. 'Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.' 'I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.'

3. The revelation that God was One, and that He was the Only, was one of the most tremendous truths ever flashed into the mind of man. It has profoundly affected thought and practical life. It has had certain great and momentous consequences.

(1) To begin with, it has given us a *universe*, a cosmos, a rational and intelligible world. There could be no universe so long as the world was supposed to be under the sway of a number of conflicting and competing deities. If various gods were at work in this world of ours, prosecuting their own plans and furthering their own purposes, we should have a confused, incalculable, chaotic world. That accounts for the sigh of relief with which—according to Dr Glover—an educated Japanese welcomed the proclamation of the Christian gospel. 'One God,' he exclaimed, 'not eight millions; that was joyful news to me.' One of the regulative ideas of our time is that of the uniformity of Nature. There is nothing accidental or haphazard or casual—Nature can be depended on. Astronomers, for example, can forecast to the minute the coming of an eclipse. But what is the uniformity of Nature but the scientific aspect of the unity of God? We have a reasonable world, a world which we can decipher and understand, a universe and not a chaos, because behind all Nature's phenomena there is a Mind, a single Mind; because God, one God, works all and in all.

One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

(2) And as it makes our world a universe, so it justifies us in believing there is *meaning and purpose in life*—the life both of the individual and of the world. To believe in a multitude of gods, playing at cross-purposes, using men and women as pawns in their game, is to reduce

life to a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. We are able to believe that things work together for good only because we believe there is one God at work, and He a good and loving God. And we are able to believe that, in spite of delays and set-backs and reactions, there is some 'far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves' only because we believe in one God, one Sovereign Lord steadily bringing to pass His own chosen and determined purpose.

(3) And, also, the unity of God carries with it *the unity of the race*. If there were a multitude of gods, each dowered with creative power, we could not assert the unity of the race. In the ancient world we do actually find some nations claiming a different origin from others in order to assert their superiority over them. But there is one God. It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves. One God! and we are all His creation. Humanity is one wherever we find it. It is one in spite of differences of colour and physiognomy and speech. It is one in spite of the vast differences in development which separate the child races of Africa and the South Seas from the finished product of Western civilization—one because created by the same God, with fundamentally the same feelings and instincts and aspirations. 'We are His offspring!' All men can make that great and stupendous statement. The unity of God is the ultimate ground of, and justification for, our faith in the essential unity of the human race.

¶ We are suffering to-day from what Lord Hugh Cecil called 'an exaggerated nationalism.' For nationalism—while right and good in itself—unless it is modified by the larger patriotism of the race, may easily become a dangerous and deadly thing. The truth that needs to be brought home to the minds and consciences of men just now is the truth that the race is a unity—the whole of mankind is one great household. We are all of the same family. Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, Swiss—whatever we be—we are brothers together, for there is one God and Father of all. Our several nationalisms are reconciled, and find their unity in this larger internationalism. And, unless our national patriotisms are modified by this sense of race relationship, our nationalisms may be the torch to set the world on fire.¹

¹ J. D. Jones, *The Inevitable Christ*, 198.

Biography in Three Words

Is. xlv. 1, 2.—'Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen . . . and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.'

HAVE we ever wondered why the people of God should be called by the name of the third of the ancient patriarchs in preference to the first two? We often, indeed, find them called the seed of Abraham, and we should easily understand what was meant if we read of the children of Isaac; but they are nowhere called simply Abraham or Isaac, although it is perfectly common to find them called, as in the text, Jacob or Israel, the name of the third patriarch being directly transferred to his descendants. Not only so: this usage has passed over into the New Testament, and we still sometimes call the whole body of living Christians the Israel of God. This is a somewhat surprising circumstance; for of the three patriarchs the third is certainly not the favourite. Very severe things have been said about Jacob, and in his history there is considerable justification for them. Abraham was the friend of God, and all generations look back to him with reverence. Isaac's name, too, has a halo round it which Jacob's does not possess. Why, then, is it that the name of the third patriarch is attached to God's people, as if he were more directly their progenitor than the other two?

Is it because they are more like him than they are like Abraham or Isaac? Is the average Christian an imperfect, stumbling mortal, a compound of obvious weaknesses and struggling virtues, as Jacob was? It would be harsh to say so. But we may come nearer the mark if we put this suggestion in a different form. Jacob was the progressive character among the patriarchs. His beginnings were ignoble, and the evils of his nature long clung to him; yet by degrees he surmounted them: he lived down the evil which was in him; and his end was that of one who, after many defeats, had at last obtained the victory. Abraham is a much grander figure than Jacob, but he has far less history. He may almost be said to be perfect from the first. If in him there was a slow development from small beginnings we have no record of it. Isaac, again, was, as far as the records inform us, a back-going rather than a progressive character. The opening scenes of

his history are beautiful and noble; but his character lacked backbone, and we see him sinking into physical grossness and moral flaccidity. Jacob's life, on the contrary, in spite of great defects to begin with and many faults by the way, was a developing and ascending one. This is shown by the names he bore: he was first Jacob and then Israel. And it may be to recommend such a life of progress that his names are given to God's people. Let us from this point of view look at the three names given them in the text—Jacob, Israel, Jesurun.

1. *Jacob*.—This was the name of the natural man. After he had received his new name, the very mention of the old one must have reminded him of the evil time when he was an unbrotherly brother and an unfilial son. It is well sometimes to go back to what we once were, because the old habits may still spring up and trouble us: though we may now have received a new name, the old Jacob is in us still. Above all we ought to go back on that old time, because it helps us to see the grace which brought us out of it: our forgiven sins are to us the measure of redeeming love.

But there is another idea inseparably connected with the name of Jacob; it is that of a Divine choice. 'Israel whom I have chosen, Jesurun whom I have chosen.' If we have any evidence to induce us to believe that we now belong to God, how has it come about? We might say that it is because we have chosen God; and this would be true. But who that remembers his own choice of God is unaware that he would never have chosen God if God had not first chosen him? As God chose Jacob while he was still Jacob, so He loved us while we were yet sinners.

¶ 'I did not find my friends,' says Emerson, 'the good God gave them to me.' Nobody finds the great Friend. Always He gives Himself. It wasn't Zacchæus who ran to Christ, who cried as he scrambled from his perch, 'Master! Master! wait for me. I am coming.' It was Christ who stopped and called Zacchæus. And so, if we are Christ's, it is because He has compassed us about with a queer obstinacy of grace that closes every door against us, that shuts up every avenue of escape, that hems us in and round. So Christ Himself declares. You did not choose Me, He says. I chose you.

It was not that I cared for Thee;
But Thou didst set Thy love upon
Me, even me Thy little one.¹

2. *Israel*.—The patriarch received a new name because he had become a new man. God does not trifle with such things. A change of name among us may be a mere freak of caprice; but, when God deliberately changed a man's name, it was an outward sign of an inward change. If it did not mean that the natural man, which the name Jacob designated, was entirely exterminated, it meant that it was so far overcome that the complexion of the life would henceforth be different. The reign of selfishness and worldliness was over, and a new spirit had entered in and taken possession. If we ask how this came about, it may have been a slower and more complex process than we have any record of; for what appears a sudden spiritual change is often only the culmination of movements going on for long before. But what we are permitted to see clearly in the records of the patriarch's life is the midnight scene on the bank of the Jabbok. It is far away, and it is evidently concealed under forms of speech which are now alien to us; but this at least is evident, that the patriarch was that night at close grips with God.

What took place is veiled for us under a strongly figurative narrative, for how can the mystery of the deep experience of any human soul be revealed except in figurative language? It says that there wrestled a man with him till the breaking of the day. But evidently a great crisis had come in Jacob's experience, in which his will came into collision with the Divine will. It was a desperate struggle the poor human will dashing itself against the barrier. But what an unequal struggle! The mysterious man had only to touch Jacob in the seat of his strength and it yielded in a moment; the sinew shrank, and he could struggle no more. Yet, in the moment when he appeared to be thoroughly beaten it turned out that he had gained the victory and won the blessing. This is not so mysterious as it looks. It is repeated in every great spiritual crisis. Our will comes into collision with God's. There is a struggle, wild, blind, painful, night-long, very likely, like Jacob's. But in the moment when we are

¹ A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 24.

defeated, when our will is vanquished, when we are emptied of self, then it is that we are crowned with victory.

¶ After the loss of his wife, whom he had dearly loved and patiently tended through prolonged suffering, Dr John Brown wrote: 'I have been thinking much lately of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, finding his weakness and his strength at the same time, and going on through the rest of his life halting and rejoicing. I believe this is the one great lesson of life—the being *subdued by God*. If this is done all else is subdued and won.'

3. *Jesurun*.—This name is added in the text to Jacob and Israel as a third name for the people of God. There is no evidence that it belonged to the third patriarch, though it may have done so. But there can be little doubt that, standing where it does, alongside of the other two, it was meant, like them, for a symbol of character. What particular phase or phases of character, however, it stands for is not so clear. The word occurs only in this chapter and in two chapters of Deuteronomy. The root from which it appears to be derived means straight or upright, and this is its most probable meaning. We cannot, at all events, be wrong in speaking of straightness or uprightness as a requisite development of the character of the people of God; and the probability is, that this is what is demanded when God calls them by the name of *Jesurun*.

This was precisely the development of character which the third patriarch needed, after he had received the new name of Israel. What happened the very next morning after the great midnight scene? He went forth to meet his brother Esau; and this is the account of how he behaved: 'Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold Esau came, and with him four hundred men; . . . and he bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.' Bowed himself—to the ground—seven times! This to his own brother! What was he bowing for? Why could he not stand up straight on his feet and look his brother in the face? Read the whole account of the preparations and dispositions which he elaborated before meeting Esau, and of the cunning, suspicious way in which he met and managed his rough but generous brother, and you will feel inclined to say: Is this the man

who was called last night a prince who had power with God?

The majority of men are more keenly alive to their relationships to their fellow-men, and the obligations which these imply, than to their relationship with God; and you will find many men who have developed a keen sense of honour in their dealings with their fellow-creatures who have almost no sense of their obligations to God. They are manly and upright; we can depend on their word; they will do, as opportunity occurs, a generous thing, and we can depend on them never doing a mean thing. Yet towards God they are totally undeveloped. But there are others in whom precisely the reverse has taken place. They are developed on the Godward side: they have felt their sins and repented of them; they love the Saviour who has redeemed them, and hold daily communion with God; they love the house of God, the Word of God, the day of God, and the people of God; but they are undeveloped on the human side. They are censorious, and nobody likes them. In business they do not bear a high character, and people are chary of dealing with them. Or they are stingy in money-matters, and their employees complain of their meanness.

¶ In a letter written by Gladstone to the Duchess of Sutherland occurs this passage: 'There is one proposition which the experience of life burns into my soul; it is this, that man should beware of letting his religion spoil his morality. In a thousand ways, some great, some small, but all subtle, we are daily tempted to that great sin.'

The text is a message of hope. It speaks of the possibilities of spiritual transformation and development. He who is a Jacob may be changed into an Israel; and the most morally deformed constitution can be straightened out into uprightness. The grace which made Jacob an example to all the ages can work the same wondrous change in us. Let us live near to Him who combined absolute loyalty to His Father with boundless regard for His fellow-creatures; He will sweeten the bitter fountain of our nature, and help us to observe the second table of the Law as comprehensively as we are trying to fulfil the first.

Manufactured Gods

Is. xlv. 17, 20.—‘And the residue thereof he maketh a god, . . . He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?’

THE ancient world believed that a god went with his people to war. When, therefore, a people had been conquered, the implication was clear that its god had been conquered. The Hebrews had passed through a succession of extraordinary misfortunes, culminating in their subjection to the people of the north. Yet they had been told by their prophets to trust Jehovah. In their imperfect fashion they had trusted. And then they found themselves in captivity to conquerors who worshipped idols. What more natural than that there should creep over their minds, sick with defeat, the suspicion that their God Jehovah was not so mighty as those cruel war-gods of Assyria? What more natural than that they should turn to the worship of the conquering gods who were so concrete, and distrust the God they had never seen, whose law was so severely righteous, and whose aid had apparently been useless?

The strong words of the prophet relate how one of those men who had lost confidence in the spiritual God of Abraham went out to the hillside, felled a tree, and cut the trunk up into parts. One of these he used for baking meat, another he used for baking bread, another he used to make a fire to warm himself, and the rest of the log he made into a god—a god made out of left-over firewood!

Of course such a lapse from a spiritual faith seems far away in the past, but the attitude of mind it indicates is by no means ancient. This distrust of the ability of spiritual power, this conviction that in some way a man may make a more efficient substitute for the unseen God of our fathers' faith, is by no means confined to the days of the Hebrew prophets. For what do we mean by God? Is it not that to which we appeal for the justification of our desire, the court of last appeal for a conscience? We are all in danger of doing exactly as the man of the olden time—of taking something very concrete, very real, and from it making this court of last appeal, thereby turning from the God of Jesus to the god of utility. Whatever

God we may have on Sunday, whatever God we may have in our creeds, there are few of us who are not in danger of manufacturing a god for practical purposes. And every such attempt at the manufacture of gods is a testimony to our distrust of the finality of the spiritual order, to our suspicion that truth and virtue, justice and fraternity, love and sacrifice are not after all the eternal things of life; that the God whom Jesus reveals is too severe for practical purposes.

What are some of these gods?

1. *Chance*.—Sometimes we distrust the very fundamental sanity of the universe and erect Chance into a sort of god. Of course we do not make idols in a literal sense. True, we do not really believe in mascots—but how should we ever hope to win any conflict, from football to politics, without a mascot? True, we dislike to sit thirteen at table, but this is from the regard for the feelings of some one of the thirteen! True, we dislike to say that we are very prosperous or that our children are well, without rapping three times on wood; but that is only to make sure that some misfortune does not overtake us! No, these customs are not idolatrous—they are only silly.

Yet on second thoughts they are worse than silly. Each is evidence that men are ready to act as if the universe were not rationally ordered—an aspect of that distrust of God which the gambler shows. The gambler looks into the face of the great universe and declares it a freak, without reason, mere chance. And therefore the life most difficult to reconstruct into any sort of moral worth is the life of the gambler. He makes a god of Chance, and Mischance rules him, body and soul. ‘He feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath led him astray, so that he cannot say, Have I not a lie in my right hand?’

¶ As early as August 1915 the inventor of a ‘special charm for soldiers’ informed *The Times* that he had sold one million and a quarter of these since the war broke out, and gave the public the benefit of this letter, received with five signatures from the Front: ‘We have been out here for five months fighting in the trenches, and have not had a scratch. We put our great good fortune down to your lucky charm, which we treasure highly.’¹

¹ E. A. Burroughs, *The Valley of Decision*, 137.

2. *Business*.—But those of us who are above this insanity of trusting to chance too often make a god out of the very things which are of great value in themselves—things of the utmost utility in life as we live it. There is Business, for example. No man would belittle our commercial activity. The great monuments of our wonderful civilization are due to commerce. Our arts, our sciences, and our splendid institutions—these are all the blossoming-forth of the capacity of men to get wealth. Yet one can clearly see that when a person erects business into a court of final appeal in matters of morals, and substitutes the laws of trade for the Sermon on the Mount, he is publishing his distrust of the ethics of Jesus. We manufacture a god to get permission to do the things which our real God forbids us to do. When a man says that this or that principle is not applicable to business, in face of the fact that his Christian conscience tells him it is right, he is making a god to justify himself.

3. *Social Convention*.—Then there is the god of Social Convention. Social conventions are a most admirable necessity of life. But we cannot safely make a god of social convention to whom we make our final moral appeal. We know perfectly well that many customs do not tally with our ideals. We go shame-facedly to places of amusement, read certain books, wear strange fashions in clothes, dance suggestive dances. Everybody does it, why should not we? 'Everybody does it'—as if custom made everything right!

¶ George Gissing in one of his novels,¹ narrates a conversation between two brothers, Oliver and Godwin Peak.

'Oliver was going out; his silk hat, a hat of the very latest fashion, lay with his gloves upon the table.

"What is this thing?" inquired Godwin, with ominous calm, as he pointed to the piece of headgear.

"A hat, I suppose," replied his brother.

"You mean to say you are going to wear that in the street?"

"And why not?"

"Can't you feel," burst out Godwin, "that it's a disgrace to buy and wear such a thing?"

"Disgrace! What's the matter with the hat? It's the fashionable shape!"

¹ *Born in Exile*.

'Godwin turned contemptuously away. But Oliver had been touched in a sensitive place, and was eager to defend himself.

"I can't see what you're finding fault with," he exclaimed. "*Everybody wears this shape!*"

"Everybody!" replied Godwin, with withering disdain. "Everybody! How you can offer such an excuse passes my comprehension. *Have you no self?* Are you made like this hat, on a pattern with a hundred thousand others?"

That is Godwin's way of charging his brother with being a worshipper of the god of social convention.

4. *Culture*.—We make a god of Culture. Far be it from anybody to belittle culture. To be able to appreciate real music as over against jazz; to love real pictures rather than the vulgarities of the comic supplement; to appreciate real literature instead of the inanities of popular fiction; to see that life is full of the laws of beauty and to enter into sympathy with those laws; to grow keen-eyed and strong; to have fellowship with that which is true and beautiful and of good repute—these are some of the gifts of true culture. Learning is not culture. Some of the most learned people have manners for which one has to apologize. But to honour culture may be to fashion one of the great idols of our modern world, for it may spring from the distrust of spiritual standards.

Moral vulgarity often comes to us so alluringly through delicate literary style, exquisite artistic technique, that we are in danger of becoming artistically and technically skilled instead of being morally virile. Experience ought to convince us that this means moral decay. Wherever you see a soul beginning to substitute mere interest in culture for virile interest in moral life, there you will see a soul erecting a new sort of god who will permit him to act, think, and enjoy and ultimately believe that which the God of Jesus will not tolerate. For in the case of culture as in that of business and social convention we create gods not to make morals sterner, but to make them looser.

¶ 'My father,' says Augustine, 'gave himself no concern how I grew up towards Thee, or how far I was chaste, provided only I became a man of culture—however destitute of Thy culture, O God.'

5. *Social Service.*—Sometimes we manufacture a god out of the noblest and most precious material—the god of Social Service. To have had any part in setting forth to the world the social significance of Christianity is one of the elements of life of which a man may well be proud. But to make social service an expression of religion is one thing; to make it a substitute for God is another. So to love the heavenly Father as to enter into fraternity with our earthly brother—that is the heart of the ethics of Jesus. But to render service without some great spiritual enthusiasm is a poor substitute for the gospel with its saving God.

¶ During the war an English nurse was at work in a hospital behind the lines, not an ordinary hospital—one of the saddest places that some of us ever saw, where ashamed men were bearing in their bodies the consequences of their vice. A visiting French physician said to her, ‘You must have a great enthusiasm for humanity.’ ‘I am afraid,’ she said, ‘that enthusiasm for humanity would not hold me to this work.’ And then she added, ‘It is my enthusiasm for Jesus Christ that keeps me here.’¹

Nothing so breeds heroism as a social passion based on a confidence in the God of the crucified Christ. Nothing is more splendidly Christian than a vicarious fraternity born of confidence in the justice of a loving God. If He is in His heaven, it may not yet be all well with the world, but it certainly will be well. A self-devotion to the needs of the world that has no such faith conceals a distrust of the reality and power of the God of Jesus, and leads to a substitute god who is less than the God in Christ.

The most deadly enemy each of us must face is the suspicion that life in its ultimate result is not spiritual. The next most dangerous enemy is the desire to win quick and concrete success. We want to tabulate conversions in statistical tables; to distil reputations from our sacrifices. But God is greater than man’s aspirations. The moral imperative needs a God greater than the policies a sense of duty may lead us to adopt. That man is indeed unfortunate who thinks that his powers justify him in accomplishing whatever he is able to accomplish. Duty at best is only the stern handmaid of the Almighty. When we champion the ever-living God with enthusiasm there comes such a keen sense of

unseen realities of life that the mere doing of this or that task grows unsatisfying. Our souls find serenity and joy only as we feel that we are serving the God of the universe. Manufactured gods, with all their power to make morality easier, will not satisfy us. They feed us on ashes; they leave us aliens in the court of heaven.

If we are to live in a universe where hundreds and thousands of stars the size of our sun blaze unseen in the space of light no larger than a pinhead, we need a God as big as our universe. We cannot believe that the God who is upholding a cosmos that stretches into abysses imagination itself cannot fathom will tolerate a dishonest or lawless man; we cannot believe that a God by whom the sun and the moon, the stars and the planets are ranged in order will permit us to substitute artistic technique for fundamental agreement with His law; we cannot believe that a God whose purposes run unchallenged through countless ages will allow human misery to conquer His great will. Here is the real alternative religion thrusts straight at our souls: Shall we trust such a God or turn to some god of our own manufacture?

If a man will follow the God of Jesus Christ and seriously make his life assume the attitude toward the world which Jesus assumed Himself, he will share in the splendid faith that, however hard his lot, the great process in which we are involved will not end in vanity and the ashes of moral defeat. And such a man, instead of making out of some utility of life a pantheon of gods to help him justify some lowered ambition or desire, will pray to God the Father, maker of heaven and earth, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’

And he will not pray in vain.

The Wonder of Forgiveness

Is. xliv. 22, 23.—‘I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the Lord hath done it: . . . break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein.’

THERE are three ways in which we can regard Divine forgiveness: we may regard it as impossible, in a universe of adamant law; we may regard it as a thing of course, if the last secret of the universe be love; or we may

¹ H. E. Fosdick.

regard it as a thing of wonder, so amazing as to be incredible were it not vouched for in innumerable lives. It ought to be noted very carefully that the last is the constant attitude of Scripture. To prophet, psalmist, and apostle Divine forgiveness is a perennial miracle. To this prophet it is so amazing that he calls on heaven and earth to help him to celebrate it. He is like a man with such good news that he finds it impossible to keep it secret. And no one can dwell deep in the New Testament without discovering there, from first to last, the same strange thrilling of exultancy in the period of instant pardon. It was that which made the gospel such good news. That was really the secret of its triumph. No faith is commensurate with human need that cannot proclaim immediate forgiveness. The wonderful thing about the Lord was this—that continually He suggested God, and yet was the friend of publicans and sinners.

1. This wonder of forgiveness lies partly in *the amazing difference it makes*. In altering one's relationship with God it alters and transfigures everything. When Lazarus was summoned from the grave, he went back to his old environment again. He dwelt in his old home, slept on his old couch, sat down to meals at his familiar table. But the miracle of heavenly pardon is more stupendous than that resurrection, for it transforms the whole environment of life. When we are out of right relationship to God, we cannot be in right relationship with anything. When through unpardoned sin God is not ours, nothing lovely or beautiful is ours. And the stupendous miracle of pardon is that in one instant, through forgiving mercy, we pass into new relationships with everything. The stars are different because we are pardoned: there is a new kinship with every bird and beast, and a new light on every human face.

O glory of the lighted mind.
How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.
The station brook, to my new eyes,
Was babbling out of Paradise;
The waters rushing from the rain
Were singing Christ has risen again.
I thought all earthly creatures knelt
From rapture of the joy I felt.
The narrow station-wall's brick ledge,

The wild hop withering in the hedge,
The lights in huntsman's upper storey
Were parts of an eternal glory,
Were God's eternal garden flowers.
I stood in bliss at this for hours.¹

The bitter things of life cease to be meaningless, and become bearable as loving discipline, once we have grasped, through appropriating faith, that now we are God's forgiven children. All this is not natural. It breaks upon the soul as supernatural. It fetches miracle out of the dim past, and sets it within the circle of experience. No one can *prove* the wonder of forgiveness to the unforgiven soul—but genuine miracles can never be proved.

2. The wonder of forgiveness also lies in *the obstacles it overcomes*. To forgive and yet uphold the moral order is a 'task worthy of a God.' A father can forgive his children the moment that they exhibit penitence. But if a judge were to forgive like that, it would mean the moral ruin of the commonwealth. And how the Judge of all the earth can pardon, and yet maintain inviolate the moral law, is a problem that was never solved till the world looked on the mystery of Calvary. Men sought for pardon by the way of sacrifice, but that could not give the guilty conscience peace. No finite offering has any real relationship to the infinite element in sin. But on the Cross there was a sacrifice that was never provided by the guilty conscience. It was provided by the redeeming love of God. The Cross discovers what God thinks of sin. Calvary, in its condemning power, proclaims the moral order of the universe. But the wonderful thing is that, so proclaiming it, it proclaims also (as multitudes have found) a full and free pardon for the sinner. It is at the Cross, when we understand its meaning, that we grasp the abiding marvel of forgiveness. Only there can we get pardon freely, and yet exult in a universe of law. Only at an infinite cost were we forgiven, for the Cross is pardon's cost to God—and the cost is the measure of its wonder.

¶ I remember some words of Socrates, shortly before he drank the cup of hemlock. In his cell in Athens he awoke one morning, and there was a friend at his bedside. He asked what news there was, and his friend told

¹ John Masefield, *The Everlasting Mercy*.

him that everything had been arranged for his escape, and that he must flee. But the brave man refused. 'No,' he answered Crito, 'unless the law releases me, I stay. It protected my birth, my growth, my education, my marriage, my whole life. It now commands my death. If I broke it, I should be haunted by its angry ghost for ever.' So law encompasses me like an atmosphere. It remains with me always. If I break it, it will haunt me for ever. But I meet its requirements, not, as Socrates did, by dying myself. There is a better way. The death of the Son of God is available for me. I flee to it and to Him. And now law is the fortress which shelters, and not the sword which smites.¹

3. Again, the wonder of forgiveness lies in *its fullness*. The Psalmist has many companions in exclaiming, 'Oh, the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven!' For however sour and ungenial are the pardons of men, with God there are no half measures. When He pardons, He pardons out and out, so that a burden is taken off the heart at once. If we would know, for our guidance, what forgiveness may be, we must study it not in men, with their reservations and suspicions and delays, but in God. 'I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.' That is the message of the Cross of Christ to all who take their past as now beyond recall. If you 'return' to a man who says he has forgiven you, you are apt to be reminded of your fault; but God bids you return because with Him, at least, you will find your sin forgotten. Some people are always reminding a man of his lack of education; in an obtrusive way they suit their conversation to his poor wits, pausing to explain that Queen Anne is dead, lest he should not happen to have heard; and he resents their condescension as an insult. Some men never trust you after a single failure, and in the smallness of the things they leave in your hands they betray their distrust. But God? He accosts a man who that very day has turned his heart from evil, and He lays on him the whole burden of the duty of a Christian man. The old life has not died out of you with its flagrant derelictions, but of that He makes no account. It was only yesterday that

you were untrue, and made through cowardice some great refusal, and to-day He meets you with a task for which the bravest might be unfit. 'I will not remember your sins,' He says. That seemed to the prophet to be the very masterpiece of God's goodness. He does not remember our sins: when He pardons, He pardons out and out.¹

4. Then we must not forget how wonderful is *the freeness of forgiveness*. All we have to do is to take it, as by the hand of a receiving faith. So incredible is that good news that we are always prone to tamper with it. We think to wait a little, and make good, and show that we are worthy of forgiveness. But the marvel is that God takes all the risks, in a way that nothing else than love could do, and invites us to accept forgiveness now. If we want it, it is ours. To want it is true penitence. To want it badly is a sign to God that we are genuinely ashamed of being bad. And with the moral interests of the universe safeguarded, as they are in the atonement on the Cross, God comes to us with immediate forgiveness. That is the wonder of the gospel, with its stupendous background of a finished work. No matter what the past has been, if you want forgiveness you can have it freely *now*. Could anything be more wonderful than that? Can it possibly be true? Well, there is only one way to prove it true, and that is by the method of experiment. Nobody will ever understand what a wonderful thing Divine forgiveness is save him who has faith to take it as a gift.

¶ After Charles Wesley had preached on the new life in Christ which is offered, a clergyman came up to him and said, 'That is what I want. I must seek it by a long course of devotional discipline, by years given to reading the Bible and years devoted to prayer.' Fortunately for us all he was wrong, and Charles Wesley did not fail to tell him so. We cannot deserve God. We can only accept Him. All that we seek from Him—pardon, power, peace and joy—we cannot merit. We can only receive. These things are not of ourselves. They are the gift of God.²

¹ A. Smellie.

¹ W. M. Macgregor, *Some of God's Ministries*, 130.

² L. D. Weatherhead, *How Can I Find God?* 279.

Treasures of Darkness

Is. xlv. 3.—‘I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I am the Lord, which call thee by thy name, even the God of Israel’ (R.V.).

THESE words were spoken to Cyrus, and, taken literally, they yield the simple meaning of a promise of booty. In these early days, so different from the modern commercial system of credit and ceaseless movement of capital, a great portion of a people’s wealth was of such a kind that it could be hidden, and when found carried away. And the obvious meaning of the words is that the conqueror will find the treasure which has been carefully secreted in hidden places, and bear it away. But that need not prevent us giving them a spiritual significance. For in point of fact the spiritual meaning, although absent from the first intention of the words, is the real import of all that these glorious chapters tell us.

1. Darkness has been a great healer and a great revealer—only less so than light. Had our day consisted of twenty-four hours of sunlight how unconscious we should have remained of most of the glory of the universe, how ignorant of our own position therein. It was the gift of darkness which literally put us in our place. Without it we should have thought that there was nothing else in the universe but our earth and the fiery orb hung up to give us light and heat. It was the coming of the darkness that enabled us to see and know, and to realize with awe that we were not the only thoughts in the mind of God. His glory, His power, His mind were more fully revealed to us through the dropping of the mantle of darkness upon the earth.

For physical growth, for much-needed rest, God’s gift of the recurrent darkness came. Without twilight, without sunrise and sunset, how much would art and poetry have lost in the way of stimulus and inspiration. The healing dews, the refuge from the pitiless glare, all these are the treasures of darkness.

¶ ‘Some of the trees on the Thames Embankment,’ says W. L. Watkinson, ‘cannot thrive because they are deprived of rest at night. Powerful electric lights take up the work when the sun sets, and the trees languish

from arboreal insomnia. The light, not the kind of it, does the mischief, for electricity stimulates growth. The too long continued light causes the trees to languish, they need intervals of rest.’

The dark hath many dear avails ;
The dark distils divinest dews ;
The dark is rich with nightingales,
With dreams, and with the heavenly Muse.¹

We are apt to think of many of the experiences of life as the absence of something else. Darkness is due to the absence of light, sickness to want of health, ignorance to the denial of knowledge. This suggestive word of the prophet teaches us to look for blessing in what we are wont to think of as mere negation. There are treasures in the darkness. It was when the Psalmist beheld the moon and the stars that he was so moved to sweet and comforting thoughts of the marvellous loving-kindness of God in caring for frail man. It was the glory of the things he had been unable to see until the darkness fell that taught him most about God and about himself. It has been found that several tribes in Africa and in America worship the moon and not the sun ; a great number worship both ; but no tribes are known to adore the sun and not the moon.

2. This thought of the revelation of the darkness is not confined to our knowledge of the works of God in Nature. It is true also of the mind of man. There is a twilight of intellectual development which is often far more favourable to the apprehension of certain kinds of truth than the high noon of intellectual brilliance. There is a brilliance that blinds, and a power of discernment that dazzles. There is such a thing as over-education, which turns out machines but destroys the power of initiative.

This thought of the treasures of darkness lights up for us also the mystery of pain and loss. These things become no longer negative aspects of something that is wanting, but in themselves sources of enrichment. *Paradise Lost*, the *Divina Commedia* of Dante—a long string of pearls up to the redemption of the world upon the Cross of Calvary—were all and each in their own way treasures of darkness.

¹ Sidney Lanier.

Perhaps it is not possible for any of us to say, 'It is good for me that I am afflicted : but there has been many a one who, looking back, could, without a shred of affectation, put it into the past tense, and exclaim, 'It was good for me that I was afflicted.'

3. What is true of intellectual discovery, and of the revelation of the dark things of pain and loss, is true most of all in the greatest field of discovery open to us, the realm of the spirit. The gifts of God, the priceless possessions of the spirit, are treasures of darkness. 'I thank thee, O Father,' said Jesus, 'Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' It is 'ignorant and unlearned men' who surprise others with their grasp of Divine truth and with the reality of their spiritual experience and the demonstration of their spiritual power.

How much light, then, does the knowledge of the treasures of darkness shed upon those limitations against which we are so apt to chafe? 'I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I am the Lord, which calls thee by thy name, even the God of Israel.' The object of all the darkness is in order that we may discover the stars and the vast orbit of God's power and care. The object of all the darkness that stoops upon our path, whether in the limitation of our intellectual powers or in the mystery of pain and suffering and loss, or in the sense of our inability to fathom the ways of God with the soul of man, is that we may discover new worlds and enter upon an ampler heritage. He gives us the treasures of darkness in order that we may know Him, says the prophet, 'the Lord which calls thee by thy name, even the God of Israel.' What pleasure it affords to be greeted by name in a foreign land where we thought we knew nobody and nobody knew us! What a delight it is, as life goes on, to have one or two who greet us by our most familiar and intimate name for the days of long ago, and because they knew our father or our grandfather! That is what God does to the soul with whom He is allowed to come into intimate contact. He calls us by our name; He gives us the assurance that He is the God of Israel—the God, that is to say, of our fathers.

'It is the glory of God to conceal a thing : but the glory of kings is to search it out' are the words put into the lips of the wisest of earthly monarchs. The glory of kings is not in their palaces or their little power and pomp, but in their ability to search out. And we who are kings and priests unto God have the same glory. A faith that we have found for ourselves in the darkness is ours as a light-hearted service of a casual creed can never be. The treasure which was hid in the field, whose discovery brought such wealth and such happiness to its finder, was probably unearthed by him as he held his plough in the heat of the day and drove a lonely and heavy furrow. It was not a mouse's nest that another ploughman turned up, but his own soul : it was not a daisy that he discovered, but a gift of song.

'There is nothing hid,' Jesus asserted, 'save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light.' The obscurity of things is God's way of tempting us on to investigate and of leading us on to more accurate knowledge—knowledge which is the result of our own discoveries.

¶ The distinguished naturalist, Jean Henri Fabre, was once asked by a visitor, 'Do you believe in God?' To which he replied emphatically : 'I can't say I believe in God; I see Him. Without Him I understand nothing; without Him all is darkness. You could take my skin from me more easily than my faith in God.' Through his diligent search among the mysteries of Nature God had given him the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places that he might know the power of God and the wisdom of God.

My little maiden two years old, just able
To tower full half a head above the table,
With inquisition keen must needs explore
Whatever in my dwelling hath a door,
Whatever is behind a curtain hid,
Or lurks, a rich enigma, 'neath a lid.
So soon is the supreme desire confessed,
To probe the unknown! So soon begins the
quest,
That never ends until asunder fall
The locks and bolts of the last door of all.¹

Is God taking us in among dark things? It is in order that He may discover Himself to

¹ William Watson.

us, for 'he maketh the darkness his pavilion.' The pavilion may be dark from the outside, but when we have penetrated it is all glorious within. There can be no 'Safety First' campaign in the venture of the soul that finds God. It is always something of a taking of risks, a hazard of faith.

Safe where no safety is, safe where men fall,
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all,

because then safe in the everlasting arms. And what is the last great venture of all but the

final discovery of the greatness and goodness of God as He restores to us the treasures of darkness, those angel faces that we have loved and lost awhile? To the soul that trusts Him here also there is revealed the greatest treasure of all.

¶ It is told of Emerson that as he lay amid the deepening shadows his face lighted up with a strange smile as he cried, 'O that beautiful boy.' God was restoring to him the lad he had lost long ago. Emerson was receiving 'the treasures of darkness.'

DIVINE GUIDANCE

Is. xlv. 5.—'I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me.'

DIVINE guidance is much discussed to-day in connection with the Oxford Group Movement. The leaders of that Movement lay the greatest possible stress upon the reality and value of it. They emphasize the necessity of waiting daily upon God for immediate and personal guidance, they joyfully proclaim that they continually receive such guidance, and they are accustomed to express their resolutions by saying, 'I am guided to do this or that.' Many on the other hand are offended by this way of speaking. To them it seems presumptuous and unduly familiar. They also, in many cases, find grounds for believing that this confidence of guidance comes not wholly from the Spirit of God but has in it a mingling of human error.

It is of vital importance that we should know the truth of the matter, for it touches very closely our daily life and conduct. If there is Divine guidance to be had we all need it, and surely we should all desire earnestly to have it in the fullest measure possible. Now in general it may be said that the idea of such guidance is no novelty. On the contrary the promise of it was given at the early dawn of revelation, and the enjoyment of it has been the privilege of believing people in every age. Since the time when Israel was led through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and fire God has guided His people, and since the day when Abraham was brought out of Ur of the Chaldees that Divine guidance has been personal and definite. In the ultimate issue the doctrine of guidance

is based on the faith that God is a living God, free to act, and continually acting upon the world and upon men. In considering the subject we must distinguish between conscious and unconscious guidance.

1. There is, first, an *unconscious guidance* of God which is universal in its sweep, and which arises out of the fact that God is the Creator and Ruler of the world. He guides the stars in their courses and quickens the seed sown in the earth. Without Him nothing happens. 'He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?' In this sense we are all under the guidance of God, whether we recognize it or not. 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will.'

In our text we have an instance of this unconscious guidance. Cyrus was one of the very greatest figures of the ancient world. Born in obscurity he rose to almost world-wide empire. The Greeks, a democratic people who hated kings, idealized Cyrus. Herodotus records his prowess, and Xenophon tells the whole story of his education and of his character, making him out to be the beau ideal of a hero and king. On his deathbed, as Xenophon relates, Cyrus said, 'I have always seemed to feel my strength increase with the advance of time, so that I have not found myself weaker in my old age than in my youth, nor do I know that I have

attempted or desired anything in which I have not been successful.' But there is one thing which the Greek historians do not mention, which Cyrus himself was not conscious of, that he had been raised up by the God of Israel and guided by Him to fulfil His purpose. The most momentous act of his reign was one to which Cyrus himself would have attached but little significance, the restoration of the Jewish people to the Holy Land. Cyrus did it simply in the process of reversing the cruel policy of his predecessors; he did it to foster peace and contentment among the subject peoples; but God did it in the interest of *His* kingdom, to further the salvation of the world.

How many instances of a like kind might be enumerated! Joseph sold by his brethren to become in after years the saviour of his people; Moses rescued by Pharaoh's daughter to be instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; Cæsar Augustus sending out his decree that all the world should be taxed, a decree which brought it about that our Lord was born in Bethlehem; Pontius Pilate sending to the cross Him who was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. In all such cases we see how a Divine purpose is hidden away in the heart of events and a guiding hand is at work, as only becomes clear in aftertime.

The action of Cyrus was part of a world movement the sweep and direction of which he could not comprehend. It was one of the firmest convictions of the prophets of Israel that Jehovah has the complete control of the world empires and the world movements of their time. He guides them as the rider guides his horse with bit and bridle, He wields them as the woodman wields his axe or saw; He raises them up or casts them down as His purposes require. This is the hidden romance of history which we are able in some measure to discern as we spell out the story of the ages. Take the age of the Reformation and consider how wonderfully everything in that wild time seemed to conspire together to keep alive the newborn faith. The enmities of kings and popes, their wars and worldly policies, the constant pressure of Moslem armies, all these forces equally hostile to the work of the Reformers conflicted together in such a way as to save it from destruction. As Froude the historian says, even 'the Turks were guardian angels to the infant Gospel.'

Is there not in all this a heartening message for our time? We stand appalled in presence of world movements and world forces which seem to hold the nations helpless in their iron grip. 'Man,' says the Russian writer, Berdyæv, 'is compelled to realize that the processes of history are fatal, inhuman forces, quite indifferent to his fate, forces as merciless as they are non-human. We find this merciless non-humanity in the history of the formation of states and empires, in the struggles of tribes and nations, in revolutions and reactions, in wars, in the industrial-capitalistic progress and flowering of states and peoples, in the very formation and development of civilization.'¹ How are we to regard all this? In the light of God's revelation in history we may say with perfect confidence that as surely as the work of Cyrus promoted the Kingdom of God, as surely as wars and revolutions with all their horror and bloodshed have been made the blind instruments of good, as surely as God in times past has often made the wrath of man to praise Him, so there is an overruling providence in the vast upheavals of to-day, and God will subdue and guide them all to serve His own ends.

Now this Divine guidance is not merely general but particular. It takes to do not only with great kings and world movements but with each one of us in the most minute and personal way. John Wesley affirms this in striking and forcible words. 'You say, you allow a *general* Providence, but deny a *particular* one. What is a general, of whatever kind it be, that includes no particulars? Is not every general necessarily made up of its several particulars? Tell me any genus, if you can, that contains no species? What is it that constitutes a genus but so many species added together? What is a whole that contains no parts? Mere nonsense and contradiction! . . . And if there be a *particular* Providence, it must extend to all persons and all things. So our Lord understood it, or He would never have said, "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered"; and, "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the will of your Father which is in heaven."'²

This is what many find it hard to believe. They feel that we are so insignificant and the details of our experience are so multitudinous

¹ *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, 11.

² *Sermons*, xxxvii. 28.

as to make personal supervision impossible. What they fail to perceive is this, that we deal in masses and exercise only a general supervision simply because our minds have not the capacity to grasp all the particulars, but it belongs to the omniscience of God to comprehend and to guide all down to the last detail. There is no such thing in the world as chance. Darwin is credited with saying that the minute variations which occur in living creatures are the result of chance, but he explained that by that expression he only meant to declare his ignorance of their origin, and he speaks elsewhere of 'that grand sequence of events which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance. The understanding revolts at such a conclusion.'¹ Well, if our understanding revolts at that conclusion we must accept the alternative, which is Divine guidance in all particulars. Robertson of Brighton in one of his letters traces out a chain of the most trivial occurrences, beginning with the barking of his dog, which in the end had a decisive influence in determining the course of his life. 'If my dog had not barked that night, I should now have been in the Dragoons or fertilizing the soil of India. Who can say that these things were not ordered?'² Every thoughtful and observant person, who takes a broad survey of the years, can trace out similar connecting links in the chain of his life, and is bound to see in them the evidences of a guiding hand. We can all say, in the words of Addison's hymn :

Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.

To those who hold this faith it brings great comfort and peace of heart. Carlyle tells of old David Hope, a farmer by the Solway, who on beginning family worship was interrupted by one who burst in crying out that such a raging wind had risen as would blow the stooks into the sea if let alone. 'Wind,' answered David, 'Wind canna get ae straw that is appointed mine. Sit down and let us worship God.' A great faith! That every straw of a harvest was numbered and appointed of God, some to be gathered in by His servant David Hope, and some to be blown to the four winds of heaven. From such faith our fathers drew

their courage in evil days, and it would be well for us in these bewildered times if we had more of it.

2. But now we come to speak of *conscious guidance*, which is the more distinctively Christian aspect of our subject. It is evident that in the guidance of man human intelligence and free will must be taken into account, and God's guidance of us may be in some measure frustrated by our blindness and perversity. It is indeed true that God can control the rebellious and make them in one way or other serve His purpose, but the result will be greatly different if we understand and co-operate with that purpose. Then we become, not blind instruments of some overruling Power beyond our ken, but free agents on the outlook for the leading of the Spirit of God and responsive to the touches of His hand. Such is the promise of Christ and such the happy relation subsisting between Him and His disciples. 'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.'

Conscious Divine guidance, then, is one aspect of Christian communion, of that happy fellowship between Christ and His people which is maintained by the indwelling of His Spirit in their hearts. In its operation it is particular, intimate and personal. Many good people doubt the reality of it and suspect it under the impression that it is an easy substitute for intelligence and moral responsibility, or that it may make the mind a prey to any delusive suggestion and lead to spiritual pride. There are dangers, doubtless, to be guarded against, but it should be clearly understood that conscious guidance implies mental awakeness, that it demands the highest exercise of all our mental faculties, for it is to mind and heart and conscience that the guidance is given.

(1) It comes through the Word and Spirit of God. The Word of God is the lamp of our feet and the light of our path, and the more our experience grows the more proof do we gain of its sufficiency for moral guidance. Nothing, therefore, which is in any wise contrary to the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures can be accepted for a single moment as Divine guidance. This lays upon us as a primary duty the diligent and earnest study of the Word,

¹ *Descent of Man*, ii. 396.

² *Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson*, 13.

with the use of all available helps to elucidate its meaning. At the same time it is the Spirit that 'breathes upon the Word, and brings the truth to sight.' It is not by mere literary study or by any cleverness, but by a spiritual intuition, that we are able to discern the Divine truth and make proper application of it to our own circumstances.

The Spirit also, through the Word, enlightens our conscience. It is a common fallacy to suppose that a man has only to follow his conscience and it will guide him aright. Conscience itself needs to be guided, for it has shared in the darkening of the soul that comes through sin. When Mary Queen of Scots countered the argument of John Knox by the plea, 'My conscience says not so,' the Reformer answered, 'Conscience, Madam, requires knowledge.' A perfectly conscientious man may go far astray, as St Paul did when he persecuted the Church of God. He did it ignorantly in unbelief when as yet his conscience was not enlightened by the word of the truth of the Gospel. The Quakers make much of the guidance of the inner light, but they saturate their minds with the Word of God and it is through the Word that the Spirit speaks within their heart.

Moreover, the Spirit may give guidance through the events of our daily life. God has a plan for each of us and His guiding hand is ever upon us however little we may be conscious of it. Surely then it should be possible, if we seriously ponder the way by which we have been led, to get glimpses of the Divine purpose which runs through it all, and some perception of the next step which we are intended to take. There are, of course, wide areas of our experience which are fixed for us, such as the relationships in our homes and the conditions under which we do our daily work. But inside these limits we are continually faced with an endless variety of options between which we must decide. We all know how perplexing these may be and how difficult decision often is. Then it is that the Spirit of God may prompt us to make the right resolve, to speak the right word, to take the right course. That does not mean that we are to lay aside common sense and foresight, and simply wait with vacant mind. There are, indeed, cases where the Spirit seems to work through the unconscious, throwing up into the mind impulses which come

we know not whence. We shall do well not lightly to disregard these, though their mysterious origin is no proof that they are of God. But commonly it is through the full and conscious exercise of all our inner faculties that Divine guidance comes.

(2) On our side, if we would enjoy this guidance, there is required above all else purity of heart. When our Lord says, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' He does not mean merely they shall see God in the beatific vision of the world to come. He means also, they shall see God in this present world and in all the experiences of their daily life. He Himself saw God in everything and enjoyed at all times and in fullest measure the guidance of the Spirit. In His heart there was nothing but a pure desire to know and do the will of God, and a pure surrender of Himself to the purpose of the Heavenly Father. There could, therefore, be no blinding of His mind by passion or prejudice, no uplifting of pride, no intrusion of selfwill. His was a heart wholly receptive to the impressions of the Holy Spirit.

In so far as our hearts are not pure they cannot be perfectly receptive of Divine guidance. There will inevitably be a certain confusion of voices, a blinding of the inner light, an inability to discern clearly what is of God and what is of self. Augustine in his *Confessions* records that his saintly mother Monica had a rare delicacy of perception. 'She saw, indeed, certain vain and imaginary things, such as the vehement desire of the human heart might conjure up; and these she told me about, not with her usual confidence, when Thou hadst shown her anything, but slighting them. For she could, she declared, through some feeling which she could not express in words, discern the difference between Thy revelations and the dreams of her own spirit.'¹ But there are few who have such fineness of spiritual intuition.

There are dangers, then, to be guarded against. There is the danger of self-delusion, for we have an extraordinary power of believing what we wish to believe and of confusing our own desires with the Divine will. There is the danger of spiritual pride, when we assume all too lightly that we are Divinely guided, and refuse to listen to reason. There are these and suchlike dangers which we cannot be too careful to avoid. But surely the greatest danger of

¹ *Confessions of St Augustine*, vi. 13.

all is never to seek the Divine guidance as we travel along life's highway. For this reason many to-day are bewildered and lost. Even to ask the question, What would God have me to do this day? would of itself be a wholesome and profitable exercise. We cannot expect at every moment to get clear guidance as by a voice from heaven, for by all the indifference and sin of the past we have put ourselves out of harmony with God, and it is no easy matter to be perfectly tuned in again. But nothing is irretrievable with God. Be sure He is interested in us and is ever seeking to make known to us His will for our salvation. If we seek to put ourselves in line with His purpose and sincerely ask His aid, then we shall find, no matter what our past has been, that He is ready, from now onwards, to guide us by His counsels while we live, and afterwards to receive us to His glory.

J. H. MORRISON

God Supreme over Evil

Is. xlv. 7.—‘I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.’

1. THESE words need to be carefully apprehended. As they stand, without any qualification, they might conceivably be understood to mean that God is Himself the author of sin; or rather that there is no sin, for humanity has no freedom of action, all we do being Divinely preordained. Needless to say, the Second Isaiah was not the kind of man to put forward such a fatalistic doctrine as that; no one insists more than he on the heinousness of wrong-doing and on human responsibility for the exercise of the gift of moral freedom. Thus: ‘Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. . . . Thou hast made me to slave with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.’ There could be no attributing of culpability in this way unless there were something to justify it; hence it is clear that, whatever it may mean to say that God is the creator of darkness and evil as well as of light and peace, it does not mean that He is the creator of sin or that He acquits mankind of blame in this regard. It is physical evil—including all the causes of human suffering, loss, privation, strife and tumult, disease and death—that the prophet has in

mind. He is telling his hearers that all that is then happening to the world—all the political upheavals, the risings and fallings of nations and empires, with the consequent widespread disturbance of old landmarks, the temporary destruction of security and prosperity, the conflict of mighty forces, and the transfer of dominion from one centre of civilization to another—is the work of the Almighty, little though men may be suspecting the fact. What he has specially in view is the meteoric career of Cyrus the Persian, once an obscure petty prince, but now the conqueror of almost the whole ancient world. The light of God was shining from a totally unexpected quarter on His hitherto enslaved people, but it came as darkness and death to those who had exploited them; He was giving them peace through the sword of Cyrus, which sword was bringing confusion and despair to their enemies. ‘I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.’

2. But there is another and larger sense in which this same principle applies to all that is wrong with the universe, whether on the physical plane or on any other. Probably those are right who say that in the last resort the problem of evil is insoluble; but surely the words of the text might without presumption or irreverence be regarded as a finger-post pointing the way to a working faith on the subject. They are the explicit declaration that apart from the will of God we should never have known anything about the existence of evil under any of its aspects; He needed it or it would not be here. There never has been another self-existent power opposed to Him and thwarting His designs; nothing can live for a moment in this or any other world save with His permission or ordination. But to say this is one thing and to say there is no will in the universe but the will of God is quite another. We can and do ally ourselves with evil in such a way as to throw ourselves into opposition to the will of God and mar His holy purposes. And He lets us do it, for to do otherwise would be to reduce us to automata and to do away with the educative value of the struggle with adverse conditions to which we find ourselves exposed. And as with us, so with the power of evil anywhere. There may be beings in the universe of far greater intelligence and power

than we, but using that intelligence and power in antagonism to the beneficent designs of God. Whether there is a personal captain of the host of evil, an outstanding individuality endowed with vast powers which he uses for the purpose of harming the souls of men and sowing discord in whatever spheres he can enter, is a question the answer to which does not affect what we have been saying. The point of importance is that God is Himself the originator of the conditions under which the misuse of the power He delegates is possible. This view at least accords with the words of Jesus as reported in the Gospels, as well as with what is written in other parts of the New Testament concerning the mystery of evil. Our Master even went so far as to credit human suffering, and to a certain extent human wickedness, to the malignant influence of spiritual powers unseen. But what we are anxious to make clear is that neither in seen nor unseen, neither on the small scale of human life nor on the grander scale of worlds beyond, could there ever have been a pang or a sorrow, a vicious desire or a perverted will, if God had not permitted it for the sake of achieving something which could not have been achieved in any other way than by taking the risk thus involved.

3. We need have no fear of this conclusion. Let us grasp it firmly, and it becomes its own interpreter. Evil is an experience necessary for the sake of good, and it must disappear when its work is done. For what is good? No man knows save by the struggle to realize it. Every man is conscious not only of the desire to choose evil, but of the obligation to choose good. To sin is to follow the lower in presence of the higher; it is yielding to that which is easy in opposition to that which is right. If evil within the disposition supplies the tendency, sin is in yielding to that tendency. This relieves no man of moral responsibility. Sin is real and we are to blame for it, but we are not qualified to judge one another. God, and God only, can disentangle the threads of human motive and estimate the amount of individual culpability.

¶ Surely we know that one of the best of the good things in life is victory and particularly moral victory. But to demand victory without an antagonist is to demand something with no meaning. . . . If you take all the evil out of

the world you will remove the possibility of the best thing in life. That does not mean that evil is good. What one means by calling a thing good is that the spirit rests permanently content with it for its own sake. Evil is precisely that with which no spirit can rest content; and yet it is the condition, not the accidental but the essential condition, of what is in and for itself the best thing in life, namely, moral victory.¹

The view that God is leading the race through an experience in which there is ample room for human initiative, success, and failure is one that bids us take life seriously but not sadly. The proper attitude for a Christian is a solemn optimism. This view has alternated between the extremes of pessimism and unreflective optimism. In Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám, it appears without the Christian sanction behind it.

Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,

Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!

Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:

For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take!

On the other hand, the poet who wrote:

All discord, harmony not understood,
All partial evil, universal good,

was not one to whom the depth and seriousness of human life were sufficiently apparent. It is not always easy to see in hours of temptation and struggle and moral overthrow that all is for the best. We can but judge by the wholeness of life, and by what we know of Him in whom were united 'optimism without frivolity, and seriousness without despair.'

Without Christ there would be but a feeble light on this world-problem. From what we know of Him we can look forward and upward. Evil is the appointment of our God and Father, who shares in every experience of His children. We are here, in Tennyson's beautiful phrase, 'to beat our music out.' We are here to know

¹ W. Temple, *The Faith and Modern Thought*, 118.

and love and gain the good. No one is in any doubt that he ought to seek the good. We learn to know the good by proving it, and making it our own. Evil is the sharp discipline by which this is possible. We may forget the event but never the experience. There ought not to be any diminution of moral zeal as a consequence of this perception. It ought but to bring us nearer to God, who will suffer none of His children to be overwhelmed.

When a soul has seen

By the means of evil that good is best,
And through earth and its noise what is heaven's
serene ;

When our faith in the same has stood the
test—

Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod ;

The uses of labour are surely done ;

There remaineth a rest for the people of God,

And I have had trouble enough for one.

God Hiding Himself

Is. xlv. 15.—' Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself,
O God of Israel, the Saviour.'

1. THERE are many things which we should expect to remain hidden from the majority of mankind. There are, we are told, ranges of colour and of sound which our senses are not capable of apprehending; the ether is full of waves and oscillations which, so far as we are concerned, might just as well not be there; there are tracts of truth which only a few highly-trained minds can explore. Science has taught us how much we live in the midst of, and are influenced by, hidden realities. But the hiddenness of God, if it be a fact, is different. God, we believe, is the most universal reality with which men have to deal. The whole creation is His vesture, is permeated by Him, is the vehicle of His purpose and the revelation of His presence. We believe also He is the most important reality with which men have to deal. Man's well-being is wholly bound up in his having a right relation to God. And we believe that He is the most active reality with which men have to deal. He seeks men out; desires them to know Himself. He is purposeful towards men. Universal, important, purposeful—you would think that if there is one

reality which could not remain hidden and which no man could miss, it would be God. Yet does He not remain hidden, sometimes to our great bewilderment and despair?

Take the strange fact that it seems possible for men and women to pass through this world and apparently miss God altogether. It is more than a little staggering that there should be so much irreligion in a universe in which God is a fact. We can, of course, explain some of it by man's wilful turning from the light; or by the atrophy of his higher faculties through sin; or by the obscuration of his mind by false thinking, so that he often confronts God without knowing it and reveres Him under some other name. There are doubtless many reasons why men miss the supreme reality which we call God. And it is at least possible that we overestimate the irreligion of men, the extent to which they do miss God. It is possible that if we could see the inner life of men and women over its whole course we should find that some sort of apprehension of God is a far more permanent and determinative factor in their experience than ever appears on the surface. But, even granting all that, it still remains sufficiently startling that God should be so unreal, so unimportant to many people, including often enough men of quite serious mind and lofty desire.

But the challenge of God's unobtrusiveness becomes in some ways more difficult and puzzling in respect of those who are not irreligious. There are those who believe in God and want to know Him and to live their lives in His light and by His strength, and yet from them also God continually contrives to hide Himself. Many are the expressions in the Old Testament of this disappointed and frustrated hunger for God, this dismay at His hiddenness and silence. Job gives us a classic instance. He cries, 'Oh that I knew where I might find him.' The Psalms are full of the cry of the heart for a God who should, so to say, evidence Himself more, not only in a man's own life and experience, but also to the unbelieving, scoffing world. 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks so panteth my soul after thee O God, . . . while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?' 'Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself,' cries the prophet, and again, 'O that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains

might flow down at thy presence . . . that the nations may tremble at thy presence.'

2. If God wants the company of like-minded children, we wonder why it is so easy for us to live without having His presence obtruded upon us, without even suspecting that He exists at all. If we look for Him, is He not always concealed?

We say we know Him as the Creator of the universe, but how He hides His shaping hands underneath processes of evolution, chains of causes, one thing leading to another, so that it is hard to disentangle Him from that which is not He! We say we see Him in Providence, in His ordering of the events of our lives; but, when we look for Him, here are coincidences, chance happenings, our own skill, someone's loving thought of us—a whole network of occurrences in which we cannot distinguish His part from ours and our neighbours' and say, 'There, that's God's doing; see Him through that; that shows what He is.' We say that He reveals Himself in the Bible; but the Bible contains a great mixture of things temporary, like the Jewish Law, and things eternal, like the spirit of Jesus, of things very undivine to us, like the slaughters of the Canaanites and the imprecatory prayers of some of the psalmists, and things as Divine as the Cross of Christ; what is man's and what is God's in the inspired Scriptures? We say that God is in people round about us, but what in them is His, and what not?

He hides Himself within the love
Of those whom we love best.

We say that He is in ourselves, a present guiding, strengthening, sanctifying Spirit, but in our thought what is His wisdom and what our own? In our impulses what comes from Him, and what from ourselves? In our characters what is of His creating and what is due to our own striving towards righteousness?

Draw, if thou canst, the mystic line
Severing rightly His from thine,
Which is human, which divine.

Strange that if He should wish to make Himself known, to give us His friendship and admit

us to His intimacy, it should be in this round-about way.

3. God's hiding of Himself, the veiling of His presence and power, the apparent remoteness of the spiritual realm, are all part of that supreme purpose of God that in this world we should develop to the fullest possible extent our natures and characters as His children.

(1) We are called upon to use every effort to make real to ourselves the great truths of the spiritual life. The being of God, the love of Christ, and communion with Him are not truths which are real to the average man. Before these things can be real to us there must be striving and work, a discipline of the spirit in prayer. The spiritual world does not give its treasures to the casual passer-by, or the visitor drawn by passing interest. The treasures are out of our reach unless we strive for them. If without any desire on their part, any hungering or thirsting after righteousness and a vision of God, God could appear and be made real to men, life would not make any demand on character at all. The whole inner secret of spiritual life is the hungering and thirsting, the awakening of need, the seeking and knocking.

¶ There is a well-known and profound saying of Lessing's which illustrates this. Lessing said, 'If God were to offer me in the one hand the immutable truth, and in the other the search for truth, I should say in all humility, "Lord, keep the absolute truth, it is not suited to me, leave to me only the power and the desire to seek for it, though I never wholly find it."' It is in that spirit that this life is organized, and in essence Lessing's great saying is a spontaneous consent to the conditions which exist. Every great gift of life is dependent upon our seeking it and striving for it.

(2) God's hiding of Himself ensures our disinterestedness. If everything were here and now made plain, we should be put to no moral test. As it is, the very darkness in which we walk, if it is our trial, is our opportunity as well. A man who would be a child of God in deed as well as in name must love the right and the good, and shun the evil in scorn of consequence. Though the right be overwhelmed, he must cleave to it.

The very uncertainty of life puts this test upon us. We are not permitted to see the

ultimate consequences of things, but we are called upon to choose whom we shall serve. Life discovers where our heart is set. The very hiding of God reveals most clearly those who truly love Him. If God is silent in face of some great uprising of evil, it is that the Divine in man may rise up against it. Issues are made to depend upon men.

(3) God hides Himself to guard our freedom. He will not dominate us. Everything is ordained to preserve our moral initiative and our individuality. This is absolutely necessary if we are really to win character. The human analogy holds true. Fathers and mothers know, as one of the first principles of a wise education, that if they are really to train their child to face the great free world, they must not dominate and crush the tender shoots of individuality. They must not obtrude their own personality so as to hold their child's life in check. Their task is in quiet, unobtrusive ways to develop, call forth, cultivate everything in the child's own personality that makes for goodness and truth and honour.

Jesus, as we, walked by faith, and not by sight. There were times when God was hidden from Him; but He knew that the hiding was solely for purposes of discovery. 'Thy Father who is in secret,' He called Him. 'Take the supreme instance when on the Cross darkness is over all the land, and darkness actually shrouds the soul of the sinless Son of God, so that His Father is veiled from Him, and He cries, 'For-saken.' But God is never hid, save that He should be manifested; neither is He ever Himself secret, but that He should come to light. Jesus' faith faced the darkness as an obscuring of God only to make Him plainer, and prayed, 'My God, My God,' in the very breath that He had to confess His sense of desertion. And that exercise of faith still further sharpens His sense for the Divine; so that with keener eyesight He sees God. 'Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

¶ A century ago the physicist, Thomas Young, discovered the principle of the interference of light. Under certain conditions light added to light produces darkness; the light waves interfere with and neutralize each other. Is there not something analogous to this in the sphere of the spirit? Is not every new unveiling of God accompanied by unsettle-

ments and seeming darkenings of the soul, temporary obscurations of the Divine Face? In all our advances in religious knowledge are we not liable to undergo

Failings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings of the creature?

And may it not have been God's coming closer than ever to the Son of His love, or rather the Son's coming closer to the Father, as He entirely shared and expressed God's own sympathy and conscience, and was made perfect by the things which He suffered, that wrought in His sinless soul the awful blackness of the feeling of abandonment? ¹

A Religion that Lifts

Is. xlvii. 1, 3, 4.—'Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth; their idols are upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: the things that ye carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary beast. . . . Harken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which have been borne by me from the belly, which have been carried from the womb: and even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver' (R.V.).

HERE is a contrast between gods that men carry and a God who carries men; between religion as a load and religion as a lift. The prophet draws a graphic picture of the huge images of the gods of Babylon bobbing and swaying in a most absurdly undignified fashion on the backs of straining and sweating beasts, as their frightened devotees try to bear them off to a place of safety before the invading Persians. 'Things you paraded about,' he derisively labels the deities of these image-revering Babylonians, referring to the processions in which these gods were borne whom now their worshippers carry off in such unceremonious haste. And he compares them with the living God of Israel's experience, who had taken the infant nation in His arms at its birth in Egypt, and had been marching majestically through the centuries bearing it securely.

1. There are many men who view religion as a burden. As they look at it, a Christian has to accept certain ideas regarding God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, prayer, the future life, which

¹ H. S. Coffin, *Some Christian Convictions*, 150.

are hard notions to make one's self receive. The intelligence has to be forced under them, much as an unwilling mule is compelled to stand still and be loaded with its pack.

A Christian has to adopt certain customs, such as saying his prayers, attending public worship regularly; observing a ceremony like the Lord's Supper, reading his Bible every day; and these customs impress them as a bore. Life lays upon them inescapable duties; they cannot see why they should cumber themselves with these additional loads. The prayers they were taught in childhood have become useless luggage which they carry along with them for sentiment's sake; they do not feel them of any real power. Church services are frankly an irksome burden beneath which they would not place their backs unless they were constrained to. The Bible is heavy reading, and with the idea of enlightening themselves (which is a prevalent passion) they usually let the Bible alone. It never enters their minds that daily contact with its pages would refresh and invigorate them.

A Christian has to take upon himself depressing obligations. His conscience keeps piling upon his shoulders a mass of responsibilities. Above all it forces him to judge himself by an impossibly high standard, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and to task himself with every secret thought, every personal ambition, every acquiescence in social conventions, every expressed opinion that discords with the heart of his Master. And to many this Christian conscientiousness is an intolerable burden.

I am battered and broken and weary and out of heart,

I will not listen to talk of heroic things,
But be content to play some simple part,
Freed from preposterous, wild imaginings . . .
Men were not made to walk as priests and kings.

Thou liest, Christ, Thou liest; take it hence,
That mirror of strange glories; I am I;
What wouldst Thou make of me? O cruel
pretence,
Drive me not mad so with the mockery
Of that most lovely, unattainable lie! ¹

The prophet would tell them frankly that a burdensome religion is a false religion; that a

¹ Dorothy L. Sayers.

god they think of in certain ideas which they force themselves to believe, worship in forms they spur themselves to keep up, and serve in duties their consciences strap upon their unwilling backs, is a man-made god, a mere idol, not the living and true Creator. Religion that is a load is not religion, is not fellowship with the Most High God. The test, he suggests, by which a man can find out whether he is dealing with an idol or with the Lord of heaven and earth, is this: Do you feel yourself carrying your religion, or do you feel that it carries you: is it a weight or is it wings?

2. A Christian's beliefs are not ideas which he compels his mind to accept; they are convictions which grip him. They appear to come to him with hands and arms, and to lay hold of his intelligence; he is aware of being picked up and carried along by them. The truth takes him off his feet, and he is conscious of resting on it, rather than on ground of his own choosing. At first he may struggle, and attempt to get free; or, perhaps oftener, he lies quietly, held fast from the start. After he has been carried some while, it never occurs to him to break loose from the grasp of these convictions; he rests in them, and is borne along by them with supreme satisfaction.

Take any of the fundamental Christian convictions—the lordship of Jesus, and His power to make strong, wise, good, the man who obeys him; the Christlikeness of God, with whom as our Father we live and work in Jesus; the inspiration of the Bible, which, read under the guidance of Christ's Spirit, supplies us with stimulating, correcting, comforting, transforming disclosures of our God; the Cross as the measure of God's love to us and of our duty to men, drawing us irresistibly to His heart and making us take every human being, even those we like least and those we have never seen, to our hearts; the Kingdom of God, the social order of justice, kindness and faithfulness which our Father devotes Himself to bring to pass and to which we, His sons, are committed—these beliefs are not loads imposed upon Christian minds.

We may remember the day when one of these convictions first came to us, like a towering giant Truth, and caught us up in its arms. We cannot forget the sensation of being raised by it, the feeling of security and satisfaction in its

strong hold, the new outlook we had from that unusual height.

3. If any man is trying to make himself believe anything about God, or Christ, or the Bible, or the Christian life, let him be sure that he is looking at some man-made view of the Divine, a mere idol. When God's truth comes along, it does its own convincing. There is no getting away from it. Its inescapableness is the test of its Divineness.

If any man has been held under certain conceptions of religious truth which he finds his education or his growing experience of life taking from him, let him not grieve. Some old Bel or Nebo has been unstrapped from his back—that is all. The living Truth cannot be taken from us; or rather, we cannot be snatched out of His arms. We are never to try to make ourselves believe anything; we are to look up trustfully into the face of the truth from which we cannot get away, and let it take us up, and hold and carry us.

Take the Christian habits of private prayer, public worship, sacraments, Bible study. If they seem weights to us, not wings, we may be sure that we are not in touch with God through them. The trouble may be that we are not using them to gain fellowship with Him. If we really want God, it is not likely that we shall be bored by these means of realizing His presence and entering His companionship. They are not arbitrarily laid out rounds of exercise, like the prescribed circle in a prison courtyard about which jailors walk convicts for their health; they are the beaten tracks free pilgrims after God have worn through the ages, the paths every believer with a true experience of Him bids us take to find and be with the Most High.

¶ Of James Denholm Brash his son has written: 'No miser could have hugged to himself his gold more eagerly than he daily clung to the treasures and joys of his communion with the Lord. His life was so spontaneous, so hilarious, so conventionless—and yet so splendidly disciplined. The locked study door, the Bible with the well-worn binding, thumbled and tear-stained, the re-bound and carefully marked hymn-book, all told that tale. No one more eagerly devoured the morning paper, but he had always first talked with the Master and mused over his Bible. He

kept his morning tryst with the Lord, and throughout the day did not lose the sense of His presence. It was this which gave him that breeziness which made one think of moors and hills and wind-swept places.'

Or take the responsibilities with which a Christian conscience saddles a man—the sense of personal accountability for the standards and morale of the life to which we belong; our consciousness that we must answer for our influence over the men at our side; our feeling that we are chargeable to God for our lives, and must plan them from day to day here, and for the years ahead of us, so that He may say, 'Well done!'—this conscientiousness is not depressing, but elevating. True, we feel ourselves under great pressure; 'I must,' we say, 'I must be about my Father's business'; 'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day, for the night cometh'; but the pressure is a driving force. It lifts us out of ourselves; it gets us over the obstacles of laziness and diffidence and cowardice; it gives us buoyancy under failure and discouragement. The Christian ideal conscience compels us to strive to reach appears like a steep summit up which we must climb with straining toil; but the Christian who is trying to climb knows that there is an almost resistless pull in the ideal, drawing him and rendering it easier to keep on clambering up, than to turn his back and take his way down. The upward pulling power of the Christian ideal is nothing else than the downward reach and lift of the living God in Christ, like whom we feel we simply must become.

4. There are many people who consider themselves Christians who never convey the impression of being lifted and carried along by a great upbearing Power. They are burdened with something—with fear perhaps, fear of the germs of disease about to infect them, of overstrain about to cripple their nerves, of social upheaval about to overwhelm them and theirs in poverty; burdened with sorrow, unable to raise themselves under the crushing loneliness that death has let fall upon them; burdened with problems, the perplexities in their own careers which cause their minds to stagger, the perplexities of our age with its pressing questions in industry, in theology, in politics, in every phase of human thought; burdened with

themselves, oppressed with the sense of their own futility, the hardness of their task of trying to amuse themselves and forget themselves. A common phase of our day is this consciousness of being restive under some undefined weight that leads people to try to throw off every responsibility as too heavy to be borne—civic duties, Church responsibilities, family obligations. It is all part of the lack of the sense of being uplifted and upborne, which is the essence of the religious experience. To possess a genuine contact with God is to be carried by Him so that fear and sorrow and problems and possessions and ourselves are not burdensome because His arms are beneath us and all.

¶ 'In 1896,' writes Dr Sherwood Eddy, 'I went to India as a missionary, carrying high hopes and youthful enthusiasm. But within a year I broke down from overwork, and came to the verge of nervous prostration. I was really suffering from spiritual maladjustment. My life was one of constant outward strain, but not one of constant inward renewal. One morning in November, 1897, after a long and sleepless night, I begged God to show me a way out of my trouble. And a verse from the Bible, flashing into my mind, changed the course of my life. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; for the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water, springing up into eternal life." From that moment I began to draw not on myself but on God. Something happened that morning thirty years ago which has been happening again every day since. I have had literally not a single hour of discouragement or darkness. I may have failed God, but He has never failed me. The Eternal God has been my refuge, and underneath me I have felt the Everlasting Arms.'

5. There are many people who would like to know whether it is possible to have such contact with the living God. They do not deny His existence, but they seriously doubt whether they have ever been in touch with Him; and they wish they knew where they could see any clear evidence that His hands took hold of them. This prophet, to whom God was the high and lofty One inhabiting eternity, would tell them that in every experience with anything or anybody that lifted them, God was surely placing

His arms about them, and they could recognize His Divine touch; and, if they let themselves go, they would be carried.

Here is a truth that takes us off our feet—that is God. In yielding to truth we are in His arms. Here is conscience—well, it may knock us down and leave us humiliated and bruised. But, as a matter of fact, we know that every knock-down of conscience is a lift up; it is the upward pull of a higher ideal; and that is God. Here is love—and how it holds a man up! There is no genuine love in all the world that does not seem to come to us from the heights, to be the downward reach of someone who would do anything to upraise us; and that is God.

Here is Jesus Christ—the embodiment of truth, conscience, love. How He grasps us, so that we cannot think save with His point of view, cannot get away from His love which always manages, in our most unbelieving moods and our most selfish states, to keep fast some bit of our nature! How He exalts us every time we take His outlook, or try to be at all like Him, or respond to the pull of His love on our heartstrings! That is God—God stooping to us, laying hands upon us, raising us in His arms, carrying us into His life.

Those who give themselves up to the lift of God through truth, through conscience, through love, and supremely through Jesus Christ, know what it is to feel themselves upborne. They are persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, their Lord.

Religious Uses of Memory

Is. xlii. 9.—'Remember the former things of old.'

No religion lays such emphasis on memory as Christianity. It is the glory of Jesus that He pressed all powers into His service. Thought, hope, imagination, fear—He used them all. But He exalted memory in religious service as it had never been exalted by another teacher. And He recognized its moral character as it had never been recognized before.

We call Christ's sayings memorable words. And memorable words are not merely words that we remember: they are words so chosen,

and so couched and set, that they make an instant impression on the memory. The words of countless writers we forget. But the words of Jesus are like barbed arrows; they are like the seal upon the wax. Once stamped with these, memory will bear them to the end. Christ recognized the character of memory in making His words so memorable as that. And when we partake of the Lord's Supper, what do we hear? 'This do in remembrance of me.' There at the Holy Table: there at the very centre of the gospel: there in the richest hour of feast and fellowship, the dominant note is memory. It sets a crown upon the head of memory, that supper. It shows what Christ expected of it. It is more than a gift, more than an aptitude. It is a moral power—a religious force.

Have we ever thought what a daring thing it was of Christ and Christianity to lay such an emphasis on memory? It is with the past that memory deals; and to enlist the memory in His service meant simply that Christ was not afraid to face the past. Any false prophet could lay the stress on hope. It is so easy to speak of an untrodden future. It is the glory of Christianity that it has a message for our past: 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'

Let us think of three offices of memory in the higher life.

1. *It helps us to Consecrate the World.*—Ruskin tells us how once he stood at sunset, in the spring-time, among the pine forests of the Jura. It was a scene of incomparable beauty, where the long line of hills was like the first utterance of those mighty mountain symphonies, soon to be more loudly lifted and wildly broken along the battlements of the Alps. The clear green streams wandered in quietness under the undisturbed pines. 'And there was such a company of joyful flowers,' he says, 'as I know not the like of among all the blessings of the earth.' And then he asked himself, Why does this scene impress me so? And it flashed on him—and no man was more skilled and subtle in such analyses—that the deepest source of its impressiveness was memory. 'These ever-springing flowers,' he says, 'and ever-flowing streams had been dyed by the deep colours of human endurance, valour, and virtue. And

the crests of the hills that rose against the evening sky received a deeper worship, because their shadows fell on iron walls where men had fought, and four-square keeps where men had died, for liberty.' It was a world of beauty; but it took memory to consecrate the world.

And with us too, in our humbler way, it is the same. The hallowing of earth is memory's secret. Mountain and moor and street and cottage are more than beautified, they are blessed, in memory. And to live in a blessed earth is a right blessed thing. There are many streams as fair as Doune, and many a ruined church finer than Alloway, but it is Doune and Alloway the thousands journey to, because of the great heart that sang and suffered there. There are villages sweeter than Stratford, and parks more ancient than the parks of Charlote, but the memories of Shakespeare that cluster there have consecrated these spots for ever. And Nazareth? Yes, Nazareth is always beautiful: and the hills would have been as green to-day if Joseph and Mary had never lived and loved. But what a richness and what a glory falls on Nazareth through the memory of Jesus Christ!

¶ 'It was a strange feeling to ride down through Nazareth, and look in the people's faces and think how Christ must have been about these streets just like these children.

'We climbed the "hill on which the city was built," and saw what is perhaps the finest view in Palestine. I thought all the time I was looking at it how often Jesus must have climbed up here and enjoyed it.

'The sight that His eyes saw farthest off was that line of the Mediterranean on which His power was to spread to the ends of the world.

'We lunched at Cana of Galilee. . . . You can picture Jesus and His mother going out from Nazareth to a near town to attend the marriage to which they had been invited. . . . We rode on through a rolling country through which Jesus must often have walked on His way back and forth between Nazareth and the lake. The whole country, every hill and valley, seemed marked with His footprints.'¹

2. *It helps us to Understand Others.*—Emerson has said that to be great is to be misunderstood. If that be so, we are all greater than we think,

¹ Phillips Brooks.

for more or less we are all misunderstood. In the shallowest heart there is a deep that defies utterance. There is a meaning and a movement here that neither tongue nor eye can ever tell. Thought, passion, dream, are far too swift and subtle ever to be expressed. We grope and stumble to explain ourselves. We speak and do, and it is all we can do. But the true man is greater than his speech. And the true man is greater than his deed. He stands, like his risen Lord, within the veil.

And has God given us no line to sound these depths? No key to unlock these secret places? We have got two from God. The one is sympathy, which opens another's heart when he is here. The other is memory, which opens another's character when he is gone.

It has been said that our friends are never ours till we have lost them. It is a strained expression of this certain truth, that of all lights there is none clearer than the light of memory. We cannot judge a man while he is here. He is too near, he looms too large. We magnify, distort, exaggerate. We envy him, although he is our friend. We grudge him his triumph while we congratulate him. Or it may be we love him far too well to be impartial. But at the grave, passions and prejudices go. And in the light of memory these mists are fled. We can be jealous in hope, jealous in love, jealous in life, but not in death. So memory redresses things: helps us to see, and know, and understand: lets us do justice to the great, and to the men and women we knew and wronged.

We have lost him: he is gone:
We know him now: all narrow jealousies
Are silent; and we see him as he moved,
How modest, kindly, all-accomplish'd, wise,
With what sublime repression of himself,
And in what limits, and how tenderly;
Not swaying to this faction or to that;
Not making his high place the lawless perch
Of wing'd ambitions, nor a vantage-ground
For pleasure; but thro' all this tract of years
Wearing the white flower of a blameless life,
Before a thousand peering littlenesses.¹

Perhaps we have thought it would be an easier thing to be a Christian if Jesus Christ were here. If only we heard His footfall on the street, it would be easier to be better than

it is. But if we do not know our friend till he is gone, would we have seen the Saviour in a Nazarene? It is an untold blessing that there have been nineteen centuries to lay asleep the passion and the tumult that might have filled our heart and steeled us, had we been born and bred with Christ in Nazareth. We can look back now, and appreciate in the light of memory. We can go to our room and close the door, and, alone with God and the Spirit of remembrance, we can accept the Christ.

¶ Men are gathered to their fathers, but their influence is even stronger when they are gone. I often meditate on the profound meaning of the words, 'It is expedient for you that I go away.' Even Jesus felt that His bodily presence obscured and made more difficult the meaning of His message. Not till all earthly memorial was departed, not till the soul received the Spirit of their Lord while the eye no longer saw the body, not till then was the message of the Life understood. So it is always. Clearer and more distinct grow the lineaments of a character when the outward form has departed. Louder speaks the voice which is heard only by the inward ear.¹

3. *It helps us to Understand Ourselves.*—'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,' says Tennyson, 'these three alone lead life to sovereign power.' We are all struggling after self-control. And every manful struggle aids self-reverence. But only faith and prayer and memory will bring self-knowledge. Faith brings it, for it brings us near to Christ. Prayer brings it, for it shows us what we lack. And memory brings it too.

The things that we remember best—these are the things that reveal the heart. If we remember melodies and music memory betrays the musician. If we remember slights and petty insults and every unkindly word about another we have the evidences of a shallow heart. But if we remember God and the wisdom and mercy of His guidance we give away the secret of our heart. So near akin are the memory and the heart. Even a child, learning a task by memory, says, 'I have got it by heart now, mother.'

As life advances memory grows richer, until in age it is memory that plays the larger part. Can it be, then, that in the hour of death, the

¹ Tennyson.

¹ *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, i. 320.

memory of the past is blotted out? It is impossible. It is a part of this immortal *me*. And when I wake, freed from this hampering body, enlarged and glorified in every faculty, my memory must share in the full tides of life. How the full memory of my sin and shame can still be mine, and I with Christ, I cannot tell. I only know that, seeing all the past shaded and filled with the pardon and the love of God, I shall be readier to cast my crown down at His feet.

If we should forget
The sins we mourn and failures, even so
We must forget the Saviour's healing grace
That has restored the sinner, and has set
Before our eyes the brightness of His face.
And we that have most greatly sinned, dear
Lord,
Can least of all afford
To lose one fraction of redeeming love.
Rather let all the past
Purged of its bitterness, its fear and strife,
Enrich the pattern woven for us above,
And serve to deepen that abundant life
He gives to His beloved.¹

The Failure of Discipline

Is. xlviii. 10.—'Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.'

THIS is how Dr Moffatt translates the verse: 'I purged you, nothing came of it, testing you in the furnace, all in vain.' God had thrust His people into the furnace in order that, purging away the dross, He might bring forth the pure and precious metal. But the fire had not done its work, pain had not turned to discipline, chastisements had not chastened: 'nothing came of it.' 'The real tragedy of the world,' writes Dr Luccock, 'is not pain; it is sterile pain. It is pain that has no fruit, no redeeming outcome.'

1. The prophet's words bring before us once more the old, racking problem of pain, 'As well,' Dean Church used to say, 'may a fly try to get through a pane of glass, as well may a man try to jump into space, as we try to solve the dark enigma of pain.' It is one of a group of questions which life thrusts upon us, yet in

¹ E. S. Barlow, *Return and Other Poems*.

the presence of which we can only bow our heads and say: 'We cannot know.' Nevertheless, though the problem is beyond us, there are some practical aspects of the matter which it is well to keep in sight.

(1) Pain *cannot be evaded*. It is here, part of the life of the world, of our own life—inwoven, so it would seem, into the very texture of things; an inescapable thing which every man must take into his reckoning.

Are there not strange events, unlooked-for catastrophes, heartbreaking bereavements, mysterious contradictions, unfathomed problems shed all along our path, in which it seems as though by some sudden combination the very heavens are blotted out? Life's heaviest blows often come most unexpectedly. Death appears, and our astonishment is even greater than our grief. Losses arise, and we are petrified with surprise as our treasure disappears in the most unlikely directions. Friends and comrades fail us, and amazement almost chokes us. Have we not times in which prayer fails and hope dies down to a poor flicker, and we can do nothing and think nothing, and when we feel as dead men that cumber the ground? Do we not know what it is to walk about with that sickening of heart which makes our food like bitter herbs, and in the morning makes us wish for evening and at night makes us long for morning?¹

(2) But if pain cannot be evaded, it *can be used*. Pain, if we will have it so, may turn to discipline, to schooling, and through it life may become stronger, sweeter, purer. We cannot dodge the grim thing, but we can lay hands on it and compel it to serve us. We are at best but poor creatures, yet with the making of saints and heroes within us, and often it is only the strong, shaping hands of sorrow that are equal to the task. Therefore, the question we have all to ask about pain is not how we may escape it, but how we may turn it to account; and the thing to be afraid of is not that we be flung into the furnace, but that the fire fail to do its purging work, that, as the prophet says, 'nothing comes of it.'

2. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' we say; it is one of the commonest of Shakespearian tags; and the very frequency with which it is upon our lips is a witness to the large truth

¹ W. Bramwell Booth.

which it contains. There are many who somehow manage to win from their sorrows both sweetness and strength. They are like plants which blossom in the dark. Trouble seems only to ripen and enrich them. Their deep distresses enlarge and humanize their souls. But it is not always so. The same sun—as the old preachers loved to remind us—which melts wax hardens clay; and the plain, sad fact is that some are worse rather than better for their sorrows.

‘Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego came forth out of the midst of the fire. And the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power upon their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their hosen changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.’ Then did the fire do nothing? Let us continue the reading: ‘Then Nebuchadnezzar, the king, rose up in haste, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? and, lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire.’ Then the fire did something: it loosed the bonds of the Hebrew children and set them free. It is a parable of what often happens. There are those who turn their loss to gain, who through the fire are made free; and they ask and need no man’s pity. But there are others whom the fire strips of everything except their bonds; and they are of all men most to be pitied. It is this which makes the fourth chapter of Amos one of the most admonitory in the whole Bible. It is the picture of a nation thrust into the fire and laid upon the anvil—

Heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in hissing baths of tears
And batter’d with the shocks of doom,

and yet, to the end, the same shapeless, intractable mass that ever it was: ‘Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.’

¶ ‘Pray for me,’ Liddon wrote to his friend Dale amid the sufferings of his last illness, ‘that they may not be laid against me in that great day.’

3. Here, for all of us, is one of life’s greatest problems—how to make sorrow not a deterior-

ating but an ennobling experience. It may help us in solving our own problems to see how others have dealt with it. ‘I remember,’ Principal Rainy once wrote to a friend who was passing through deep waters, ‘I remember my father saying to me late in life that he could look back on passages in it so painful that at the time it seemed to him intolerable; and yet, looking back, he distinctly saw that those were the passages of his life that were indispensable—he could not have done without them.’ That is the word of experience.

The prophecy of Hosea is not easy reading. Yet the Book seems to have been a favourite with Jesus. Twice at least He quoted its great saying, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ And there are not a few such words in the little Book: ‘When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt;’ ‘I taught Ephraim to walk, holding them in my arms;’ ‘How can I give thee up, Ephraim? How can I let thee go, Israel?’ That is a new note in Hebrew prophecy. Amos, Hosea’s great contemporary, has nothing like it. How had Hosea learned it? Through the pain and bitterness of his own experience. Hosea had married a wife who had proved false to him, so that he had been compelled to put her away from him. But love was not slain, it only slept, and when it awoke it yearned over her as before; he bought her back from the slavery into which she had been sold and took her to himself again. That was the tragedy that made Hosea a prophet. It is as if he had argued: ‘If man can love like that, what must God’s love be like?’ In the strivings of his own wounded spirit he could hear the pleadings of the Divine love. So he turned his pain to profit, learning through the grief and heart-break of his own life to understand and to declare to others the love which dwells for evermore in the heart of God.

¶ One of the most beautiful and one of the most painful books which this century has given to us, is a little autobiography written in a convict’s cell. The writer was a brilliant man of letters who sinned deeply, and paid in a two years’ imprisonment the penalty of his sin. Through all the first year of his prison life he carried a growing burden of bitterness in his heart—bitterness against his lot, against the prison officials, against all men. Then, later, he came to see that this was a blunder—a

blunder which, if persisted in, would poison all his after life. Somehow he must get out of his punishment something besides bitterness and despair. And the book closes with what reads like a prayer that the great waters through which he has passed may cleanse him, and the bitter herbs of which he has eaten may make him whole.

4. When Leslie Stephen's wife died, he wrote to his friend, John Morley: 'Grief for one so noble should be itself ennobling.' Is not that the right note to strike? When we think of those who are gone—their goodness, their purity, their sacrifice—is it meet that we should give place to the spirit of gloom and bitterness? Should not noble memories make the nobler those who cherish them? We do dishonour to our dead when from their graves there spring only the ugly, sullen weeds of a self-centred life. There are two things from which all who suffer should pray to be delivered.

One is a morbid self-pity. There are those who make a luxury of their grief, who nurse and fondle it and will not let it go. Everything in their little world is made to revolve around what has happened to them. One would not judge them harshly, but there are few sadder sights in life than that of suffering which has grown fretful and querulous, blind to the pain it inflicts, blind to everything save to its own poor self.

¶ Mrs Charles Kingsley once said to a friend, with splendid emphasis, 'Whenever I find myself thinking too much of Charles, I read the most sensational story I can find. Hearts were made to love with, not to break!'

The other is hardness. 'Be thankful,' a mother wrote to her daughter who was carrying the cruellest cross that ever lies on a woman's heart, 'be thankful that you have been spared the worst, that you have not grown hard.'

Pain is part of the common lot—a thing that none may wholly escape. The great question is not how much or how little of it falls to our share, but rather this—what are we doing with it? what is it making of us? A great Scottish teacher spoke once of 'lost sorrow'—sorrows, he meant, which come and pass and leave us no better for their coming:

I purged you, nothing came of it,
Testing you in the furnace all in vain.

Against that let every man pray with all the passion of his being.¹

National Prosperity and Permanence

Is. xlviii. 18.—'O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.'

THE passage from which these words are taken is addressed to a nation; the images are the images of national life, and the blessings, expressed in Oriental phrase, are those which are related to national well-being. The peace that is to flow like a river, continuously, that is, from generation to generation, is the prosperity of a people; the righteousness like the waves of the sea, coming on and coming in with steady, irresistible energy, speaks of a prosperity that is not merely material but moral; and the seed as the sand, and the name not cut off for ever, suggest the idea of abiding influence—of national perpetuity and stability.

1. The question is sometimes put to the modern preacher why he should make so much in his teaching and preaching of the old Hebrew writings. What have we to do with the sins and sorrows, the development and decay, of a small, ancient nation? And yet these writings have their transcendent value for every age and nation. The prophets and poets of Israel saw as few men have ever seen the moral foundations of human life—the vital connection between righteous conduct and the realization of the noblest and best ends of life by nations or by individuals. This has lost none of its force with the lapse of centuries. Times change, but the same causes of peace and trouble, of growth and decay, are to be found in every age and in the life of every people.

We must never allow ourselves to forget that moral laws are as real, as regular, as certain as physical laws. We reap what we sow. It is cause and effect in the moral as in the physical realm, and the way to all true well-being lies in understanding and obeying the order of cause and effect under which God has placed mankind. Neither in the world of Nature nor in the world of men does anything come by chance or caprice. Peace is not something shot out of the sky—it is a result. Prayer—that is, the

¹ George Jackson, in *The Methodist Recorder*.

sincere seeking and desiring of the soul—is a condition of the heavenly help, for God does not force His best blessings upon us. But prayer, though it may supply one with power to obey, can never be a substitute for obedience. In all that belongs to human well-being—to health and power and peace of life—we get not by mere asking but by putting ourselves as individuals and nations in line with the will of God, on the side of God against our selfish and worldly selves.

By the commandments in the text are meant, no doubt, the laws of Moses, those lines of conduct which he set before his people and which are worthy of their place at the head of the moral utterances of the world. These laws are a transcript and reading of the deeper laws of God, and were discovered by man in the course of his history, because they were written from the beginning on his heart and learned by slow and painful experience to be conditions of his best life, but which he would never have found out to be the best for his life had he not been so made by God, and the world in which he lives so framed and ordered, as to make them the best. The venerable Hooker was right when he said that the seat of law is the bosom of Almighty God; and what God commands, the human soul in its highest moments also commands.

Moses, in his farewell charge to his people, speaks of obedience to the commandments as essential to healthy and progressive life. By obedience he assures them they would live and grow as a people, become a truly great nation and survive the disobedient and disorderly nations around them. It would give them a hold upon the very soil itself which could not be unfastened. The saying of Lord Bacon that prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament and adversity of the New is oftener quoted than understood. It reminds us that material prosperity is by no means a synonym for good, and that adversity may not be an evil at all, but a blessing in disguise, furthering and not hindering the best ends both of individual and collective life. But it is assuredly not true if we interpret it to mean that obedience no longer brings material blessing here and now, and disobedience loss and decay. Moses, we read, suffered the reproach of Christ, and he was the very man who promised in the name of God to his people a noble prosperity if they obeyed the

Divine laws of life, and trouble and loss and decay if they departed from them. And why? Because he knew and believed that all that makes a nation truly great follows on obedience to the laws of God, and that all that tends to disintegrate and destroy a nation follows upon not hearkening to the commandments of God. And what is this but saying that the God who creates and governs the world has arranged things so that a people's obedience to His laws will lead to national prosperity—to social and moral well-being? Although we must not speak of the results of obedience in a materialistic way—for the Divine reward of right-doing does not lie in material things, not in the increase of wealth and dominion, but in the increase of those qualities in the life and character of a people which bring light and peace and moral power—yet the ancient Hebrew idea that temporal and material blessings were the result or reward of obedience to the eternal laws of righteousness must in the long run be true—true that the nation which in all things deals righteously must in the long run be outwardly prosperous, and that the meek and not the arrogant shall finally inherit the earth.

¶ One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness: that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that in the long run it is well with the good; in the long run it is ill with the wicked.¹

It may sometimes appear as if national greatness and prosperity were not only forwarded but actually achieved by the disregard of all moral principles and scruples, by making nothing at all of truth and justice, by trampling upon every right of man and upon every sentiment of humanity. But all such apparent successes are short-lived; they build the certain causes of their own final downfall into the very foundations on which they rise for a time into power and splendour. A people cannot fail in justice to other peoples, cannot wrong men and classes of men, poor men and labouring men, white men or black men, without wronging their own country, without hindering and thwarting the possibilities of real and sound progress. It was one of the ancient wise men of India who wrote: 'Justice being destroyed will destroy; being preserved it will preserve; it must, therefore, never be violated'—an echo, surely, of the prophet's words.

¹ J. A. Froude.

¶ 'Oh long, delaying arm of might,' exclaims Matthew Arnold, 'will the Eternal never put thee forth to smite those who go on as if righteousness mattered nothing? There is no need; they are smitten. Down they come, one after another. Assyria falls, Babylon, Greece, Rome, they all fall for want of righteousness. Even Judea itself—the land of God's Israel, falls too, and falls for want of righteousness.'

¶ France, which made all Europe cower at her feet, fifty years later lay prostrate at the feet of Germany. For France surrendered herself to corruption, and threw to the winds the restraints of that religion which she now spurned. When the enemy swept to the gates of Paris forty years ago, no man's word in France could be believed! In 'extinguishing the light of heaven,' France extinguished the might of her right hand. If history proves anything, it proves that judgment follows hard in the wake of degeneration; that the universe is so ordered that the stars in their courses fight against every Sissera.¹

2. The pathetic expostulation of the text is not the voice of an absolute ruler or autocrat, but the voice of a Creator and Father who respects the freedom of His children—their freedom even to do wrong and to mar and spoil His world. It was said by a celebrated orator in the House of Lords more than a century ago that an Englishman's house was his castle and that not even the King of England dare enter it, however humble, without its owner's permission. It is in some such way God treats men. No matter how sorrowful the consequence of disobedience may be, no matter how vital the union between obedience and our peace may be, He does not seek to compel obedience or stoop to use any other force than that of persuasion—suggesting, prompting, inspiring, directing, but never coercing or overruling the will.

It cannot be said that we are disobedient because we are ignorant and do not know the commandments. It is not difficult to know the Divine laws of life—the laws which are essentially and eternally just and right. They are not obscure. They are simple, elemental, self-sanctioned, written upon the heart by the hand of God and made clear and certain by experience. Always and everywhere man knows

enough to obey. Yet the failure of men to conform to the conditions of their true welfare is the ever-recurring tragedy of existence. It is not Israel alone among the nations of the earth that has lost good and great things through disobedience. What chances of noble and peaceful development, what power of progress, what opportunities of service, and what influence have men and communities of men thrown away through pride and greed and ambition. What kind of men and women we ourselves would have been if we had followed the ways of God, and not taken to lower, looser, and easier ways. What might we not have been, what might we not have done, what power and influence might we not have won—if we had but given ourselves unreservedly to God, to know and to do His will.

3. We know from Jesus Christ that God is ever seeking by all the resources of His justice and mercy to bring us into relations of sympathy and harmony with Himself and His will; but this prophet, hundreds of years before the day of Christ, saw this truth; saw in his own solicitude for the welfare of his people a dim but true symbol of what is in the heart of God, and, believing himself to be the prophet and representative of God to Israel, poured out passionate pleadings and regrets, of which the text is a striking instance. He may well be called the Evangelical prophet, for the prevailing note of his prophecy is the compassion of God. And he does not stand alone. Everywhere mingling with prophetic reproofs and warnings we find gracious words like his; hear voices which are the same in their tone and accent as that which we hear in the Saviour's appeal to Jerusalem—'O that thou hadst known in this day even thou.' The truth is that God and His ways of dealing with men and nations are fundamentally the same from age to age. The revelation of His character and purposes may be gradual, and our apprehension of that revelation may also be gradual, but the character of God, which is the ultimate ground of human trust and hope, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Being righteous, He cannot be satisfied with anything less than the righteousness of His children—punishment can only be a means to that end, disciplinary and educational. Being eternally merciful and compassionate, He cannot cease to seek His

¹ J. R. P. Selater, in *God and the Soldier*, 278.

children's welfare and to be afflicted in their afflictions. We know what human love can suffer and endure for the objects of its care, but what Infinite Love is, and what the sorrow is of Infinite Love, when in the exercise of their free will the children of men become disobedient and rebellious, who can measure? He can, we are sure, never cease to love them, never cease to desire their restoration. It is His compassion which the yearning solicitude of prophets and saints helps us to realize. 'O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.'

Shade of His Hand

Is. xlix. 2.—'In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me.'

THE hand of God in Scripture is very often mentioned. It is one of the great sources of the strength and solace of His people. It is a hand of almighty power, for 'it taketh up the isles as a very little thing.' It is a hand of unfailing liberality, for it supplies all our returning wants. It is a hand of beauty and of wisdom, for it arrays the lilies of the field, and leads the wandering feet into green pastures. It is that hand of which the prophet says, 'In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me.'

There is a deep sense in which every Christian leads a *continuously* hidden life. It is a life 'hid with Christ in God,' and that from the beginning to the close. But the concealment of which the prophet speaks is not the constant abiding in the Father; it is rather the temporary sheltering of His love. It is something that applies to the outer life which men see, rather than the inner life known only to God. There are times in every spiritual life when the greatest of all needs is quiet withdrawal. For the spiritual harvesting of life shadow is as needful as the sunshine. And it is one of the great offices of faith to take the shadowed seasons of the life and to reckon them the shadow of His hand. It is not the whole of faith to be assured that God's hand is guiding through the years. Hours come when we are laid aside, secluded and withdrawn from high activities. And in such hours it is a mighty comfort if faith is strong enough so to transmute the

shadows that they become the shadow of His hand.

1. God's love is brought before us here as a *preserving and protecting influence*. And it preserves and protects us, according to the text, in a special way—by withdrawal. Now that of course is not always God's plan. He has other ways of arranging in providence for the safety of His people, than by removing them from the sphere of their danger. When opposition or temptation threatens He may keep men face to face with them in order to educate and to strengthen them by the process. He means to brace them by exposure. He intends to drill them through the exercise of self-restraint and obedience. At such times as these they are called to be strong and to quit themselves like men. They are summoned to work and not to wait, to fight and not to rest. But at other times it is something different that the Christian needs. He needs shelter, quiet, and removal. And when such seasons are needed, they are given. The power that once thrust him forward begins to check him instead, makes a stop in his life, an interruption in his work. These pauses and breaks in our life and our work—these chapters in our history that seemed at the time to be little but blanks, what did they mean? This, perhaps, among other things, that God meant to shield us. And so He keeps us from work; when He sees that work, even for Himself, is attended with some particular difficulty or temptation with which we are unable for the time being to cope. He cuts us off from participation in business and in active life; but, it may be, He does so when He finds that business is entangling us in its too great love. All this in cases where the danger is unknown by us; and when it is known and realized, as it sometimes is, with what confidence we can leave ourselves in the same protecting care and love.

2. Again, the text leads us to think of God's care as a *preparing influence*. It trains as well as protects. A bruised reed He will not break and smoking flax He will not quench. When a taper has been newly kindled the slightest gust of wind will put it out. It is then that a man, to guard it from extinction, will encircle it with the shadow of his hand. And often, when the heavenly light is lit, and not yet equal to the

whirling wind, God shelters it in some such way as that. That was why Paul was sent into Arabia after the great hour of his conversion. That is why, as Spurgeon puts it, God often refuses first offers of service. That is why He puts us in our homes, in the secluded and sheltered days of childhood, when things unseen are so intensely real. That hiding of the Apostle in Arabia, that seclusion of our infancy, that secrecy which distinguishes beginnings, whether of a daisy or of a soul, all of it is the stratagem of love, that the smoking flax be not extinguished.

Sometimes He hides in the shadow of His hand that life may be deepened and enriched. Think, for instance, of the case of Luther. Luther had reached the climax of his life; his influence was mighty across Europe: and just then his life was cleft in twain; he was shut up in the old German fortress. Yet who can doubt now, as he recalls the story, and remembers all that it involved and led to, that for Luther the shadow of that fortress was the shadow of the hand of God. He came forth deepened and enriched. He came forth new-armoured in the Word. He came forth with a new serenity, and under a heaven that held a larger sovereignty. And how many are there who have been withdrawn, it may be in the flood-tide of activities, to find afterwards, as Luther found, that they have gained more than they have lost? All life is dark with shadows. Are they not often very enriching shadows? Have they not taught us what we never learned when the sun was blazing in the sky? So we look back on things that in their coming fretted us, and made us wonder if God was really love, and *now* we recognize with perfect clearness that they were all the shadow—of His hand.

¶ In the third quarter of last century there was no more famous preacher in Paris than Père Didon. Whenever he preached the church was crowded to overflowing. In 1880, owing to a dispute with his superiors of the Dominican Order, he was banished to the convent of Corbora on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It was a terrible blow to him, for he loved the life of Paris, with its movement and stir, and all his powers were drawn forth by the sight of the immense congregations which hung upon his words. The sentence nearly broke his heart, and his letters at the time are the letters of a man who felt himself to be a

martyr. But his seclusion was not fruitless. For it was during these years of silence that he planned and worked at his *Life of Jesus Christ*, one of the greatest Lives of the Saviour ever written. And there were those who assured him that his years in the convent would not be barren of gain. Pasteur, the eminent scientist, wrote to him in these words—‘Shall I confess the truth? I have not pitied you for a moment. You will come back with your soul still loftier, your thought more firm, your mind more disengaged from earthly things, and in the eyes of the world you will have gained a new prestige which will give your preaching added power.’¹

And sometimes He hides us in the interests of a larger service. We are withdrawn from things that we are doing because He has better things for us to do. How strange it must have seemed to Paul that he should languish in a Roman gaol. Was it not intolerable, that confinement, and he on fire to evangelize the world? Yet some of the greatest of his letters, which are read to-day in Africa and China, would never have been written but for that. Very often the way to richer service lies through a season of seclusion. Illness comes, or unexpected trial, or the bitter anguish of bereavement. And then we discover, as the years pass, how new notes have stolen into the music, often the very notes the world was wanting. It is a wonderful thing to be guided by God's hand, and to feel it increasingly with the increasing years. That was profoundly felt by the Apostle, as it was profoundly felt by Bunyan. Some of the richest letters of St Paul, and the *Pilgrim's Progress* of John Bunyan, come to us from the shadow of His hand. It is the glory of God to hide a thing, and He has a thousand places where He hides things. Some He hides in the bosom of the earth, and others, like pearls, beneath the sea. But His children are far more precious to Him than the costliest of pearls or diamonds, and He hides *them* in the shadow of His hand.²

3. The text speaks to us also of the *individualizing influence of God's care*. While we rest in the shadow of the hand, God of course has the whole of us; but there is another side to the relationship—we have the whole of God. Here among men sympathy loses in depth and

¹ James Colville.

² G. H. Morrison, *Highways of the Heart*, 51.

in value just in proportion as it gains in diffusiveness. He who is everyone's friend is in reality the true friend of no one. We think the freshness and the charm of his friendship for ourselves is marred by the discovery that he extends it with equal frankness and favour to another. Love seeks a monopoly of its object. And the feeling is based on facts, facts that stand connected with the needful limitations of human nature. But our God is an infinite God! It is our comfort to remember He is ours, as though there were nobody else in the wide world to care for but us. The secret place of the Most High is for *me*, with all its treasures of special interest and of special grace, just as if none had entered its shadow but myself.

The Success of Failure

Is. xlix. 4.—'Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.'

LIFE is a struggle. In every department and province of life men are struggling, straining every nerve to win. There are prizes for the successful, and with all their wits and with all their might men are struggling to obtain them. And this is probably as it should be. It is well that men should live ambitiously. It is well that they should throw their whole power into their life.

Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will.

In the struggle of life, however, it is given to very few to achieve conspicuous success. The majority miscarry. Their dreams are magnificent, but they are not realized. Their schemes do not come off. Their efforts miss the mark. Again and again they have to confess themselves defeated. The Emperor Joseph of Austria is reported to have said, 'You may put for my epitaph, "Here lies Joseph, who could succeed in nothing."'

¶ 'There is indeed one element in human destiny,' writes R. L. Stevenson, 'that not blindness itself can controvert: whatever else we are intended to do, we are not intended to succeed. Failure is the fate allotted. It is so in every

art and study: it is so above all in the contingent art of living well.'¹

Now what is the meaning of this? Are we really doomed to fail—unreservedly and utterly? Is our destiny simply 'to be beaten and baffled'? And is the prophet's despairing utterance, 'I have laboured in vain,' the final verdict of experience on human effort and endeavour? Or may it be, on the contrary, that much of the failure is only failure in appearance, and that often when we seem to fail, and say we fail, and think we fail, we are actually achieving some real, if unrecognized, success? For ourselves, we believe that there is such a thing as 'failure that succeeds.'

1. Paradoxical as it may sound, the very fact of failure implies success of some sort. For man fails only as he rises in the scale of being. It is just as the poet teaches:

In man there's failure only since he left
The lower and unconscious forms of life.

There is no such thing, of course, as failure in the non-human realm of Nature. The mountain does not fail, and the tree does not fail, and the animal does not fail. There is not a note of failure in the morning-song of the birds in the trees. And even when we come to man, we must admit that it takes high qualities to fail on a grand scale. The mean little commonplace man has his mean little commonplace ideal, and he achieves it without much difficulty. Why not?

That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it.

Or even if he misses what he aims at, still his aim is such a petty aim, and his striving is such a paltry striving, that his frustration scarcely deserves to be dignified with the name of failure. But go on now to the man with the noble ambition, the man with the sublime ideal, the man who can be satisfied with nothing but the very best, whether his line be literature or art or science or statesmanship or morals or religion, and here, indeed, you find the failure. The thing is unavoidable. For the loftier the man's standard, the less is his chance of reaching it. His 'yonder,' as Goethe says, is never

¹ Christmas Sermon.

'here.' He is simply bound to fail. But do we not see that such failure is deeply rooted in real success? It is only the man who has triumphed over the brute, only the man who has risen victoriously to the loftier ranges of life and manhood, that can complain that he has failed. A noble failure is a finer, and a greater, and, in the truest sense, a more successful thing than a mean success. 'Better have failed in the high aim, than vulgarly in the low aim succeed.'

2. Again, it is seldom that one comes across a failure that is total. Indeed there never was a brave attempt which did not achieve somewhat, though it may have missed the object that was particularly aimed at. Always there was something gained, something profitable, and something which would never have been gained had it not been for the endeavour which appeared to end in a fiasco. A French poet has given us a little parable on this subject in a poem entitled 'Grand Plans.' He tells how in early youth he aspired to write an epic; but gradually, as the years rolled on, the epic was abridged to a tragedy, then the tragedy to an ode, then the ode to a little song, and finally even the song dwindled down to a quatrain. But the last got written.

And the same principle obtains in the higher spiritual sphere. Consider the ideal of the saint—to be perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect. What mortal man can compass so transcendent an ideal? How certain, how inevitable, must be the failure of him who seeks to realize it! Yet is not this pursuit of the unattainable the very spring of all the virtues of the purest sainthood? The hope, the prayer, the strong desire, the passion for the infinite, become, as it were, consolidated into the fabric of the Christian's character; and although he does not reach the longed-for paradise of perfection, yet by reason of his endeavour—the very endeavour that always fails—he is not far from the Kingdom of God.

3. Few of us really know whether we fail or whether we succeed! Is it not the fact that the greatest results of our life and work are almost always hidden from us? How often do we cry out that our labour has been in vain, just when we are proving ourselves most signally successful! Surely this is a matter of ordinary ex-

perience. Think of Virgil in despair directing that his immortal work should be burned after his death. Think of Calvin, near his end, declaring to those around him, 'All that I have done has been of no value, and I am a miserable creature.' Or think of Cecil Rhodes, after leaving his mark upon a continent, finishing his life with the pathetic words, 'So little done; so much to do!' And did not St Paul himself, after all his miraculous achievements, tremble lest in the end he should be found to have been a useless worker? It is curious indeed to observe such successful and serviceable men—a poet, a thinker, an empire-builder, a chief apostle—so ready to echo Isaiah's lament and to rate their wonderful accomplishments at practically nothing. What do we conclude from this? Is not the conclusion obvious—that the thing which we are least capable of estimating aright is the success or failure of our own life and work? We toil for some great end; but when the result that we expected does not come just in the form in which we expected it, or at the time when we expected it, we accuse ourselves of inadequacy. But if our toiling has been faithful, God—and sometimes history too—will pass a different verdict.

¶ A story is told concerning Robertson of Brighton, who, dying in his thirty-seventh year, abused, misrepresented, and still comparatively obscure, seemed to many to have ended an unusually promising career in utter failure. Years afterwards a Brighton tradesman testified that he kept a portrait of the preacher in the room behind his shop, and that, whenever he was tempted to some shady trick of business, he went and looked on the face in the picture, and then felt that he could not do it.

¶ When Bishop Hannington was journeying up to Uganda, and was murdered by the emissaries of the King of that country, he said with his last breath: 'Tell the King that I open the road to Uganda with my life.' As men estimate things, he had failed: as God estimates them, he had succeeded. He was a pioneer, and he met the fate of the pioneer; but his dead body was one of the bridges by which the army of Christ should advance to another conquest.¹

4. Let it be granted that we have failed utterly. Yet failure itself may be made the

¹ C. D. H. Macmillan, *The Sleeping Cardinal*, 80.

instrument of success. 'What is defeat?' cried Wendell Phillips, in one of his speeches. And his answer was, 'Nothing but education: nothing but the first step to something better.' Failure may teach us the way to succeed; for, by revealing to us our faults, it may stimulate us to correct them. By the failure of wrong theories the thinker, who is in earnest, may be guided towards the truth. By the failure of bad methods the practical man may discover the better way of doing things. And so it is also in morals and religion. 'A past error,' it has been said, 'may urge a grand retrieval.' Why, even by sin itself we may be brought to the realization of the gravity of sin, and so be shocked into giving it up. St Augustine says somewhere that if we tread our vices underfoot, they will become as the rungs of a ladder by which we may ascend to heaven.

¶ In the domain of science and art the term 'waste product' is dying out, because we are finding out that there is no waste. The refuse of the city is utilized for the production of electricity. Coal-tar was once regarded as a worthless by-product in the manufacture of gas, but now it is no longer counted a waste. It has a high market value. Out of it come many healing drugs, as well as the beautiful aniline dyes with which we are so familiar. What glorious products, what beautiful characters, is God extracting from the waste and failure in the lives of His saints.¹

To recognize, then, the successful possibilities of failure, is a primary necessity of our daily life. For we are all failures, more or less; we have all, in some way or another, tripped and stumbled and broken down; and unless we hold on to the truth that a man may fail and still succeed, we must continually be exposed to one of two imminent dangers. The first is the temptation to lower our standard, to cheapen our ideal, to desist from all attempt to take the highest line about things. But that is the real failure—failure of the most fatal kind. 'The only failure a man ought to fear,' as Felix Holt says in the novel, 'is failure in cleaving to the purpose he sees to be best.' The second danger is loss of hope and loss of heart. The ideal may not be abandoned, but it is pursued without enthusiasm. Life loses its swing and go. No high effort really fails. That is a conviction that puts grit into a man. We will keep up

our courage, though everything seems to be going wrong with us. We will fight the good fight fairly through to the finish. We will run out the race whether winning or losing.

We should learn to pay less attention to our passing ideas and impressions concerning failure and success, less attention to the visible results which are frequently misleading and almost invariably depressing, and more attention to the truth that for the good worker there can be no failure that is not a 'failure that succeeds.' And remember that, even when things are at their worst, still 'man's extremity is God's opportunity.' The hours when we are down, defeated, done for; the hours in which we feel that we simply cannot do anything more—they are the very hours of the living God, the very hours when God most draws near to us with His almighty power, and does for us all that we cannot do ourselves.

Oh, long and dark the stairs I trod,
With stumbling feet to find my God:

Gaining a foothold bit by bit,
Then slipping back and losing it:

Never progressing, striving still
With weakening grasp and fainting will,

Bleeding to climb to God: while He
Serenely smiled, unnoting me.

Then came a certain time when I
Loosened my hold and fell thereby.

Down to the lowest step my fall,
As if I had not climbed at all.

And while I lay despairing there,
I heard a footfall on the stair,

In the same path where I, dismayed,
Faltered and fell and lay afraid.

And lo! when hope had ceased to be,
My God came down the stairs to me.¹

¹ G. A. Sowter, *Trial and Triumph*, 136.

¹ Theodosia Garrison.

The Freedom of the Spirit

Is. xlix. 9.—‘Saying to them that are bound, Go forth’ (R.V.).

MAN, said Rousseau, is born free; but everywhere he is in chains. And the heaviest of the chains are those which he makes for himself. But what the spirit of man can make it can also break; and in a sense the history of the race is a history of making and breaking bonds. Not, indeed, that the human spirit has ever deliberately fashioned bonds for itself. It has created organs of security; it has formulated doctrines in order to fix and to perpetuate its own discoveries in its experience of life; it builds up institutions to serve the purposes of life. But in the course of time, it comes to regard these things as possessing a certain sacrosanct and final quality and to imprison itself within them. Doctrines, institutions, laws, customs that were meant to be channels of life become the prison of life, and often its grave. But soon or late the time comes when the spirit that is in man breaks through the old traditional fences and goes out in search of new truth, new ways of life, to create new organs for the expression of new ideals and the furtherance of larger hopes. The great formative passages in human history, those supreme moments the remembrance of which thrills us and warms our blood, are the days when the human spirit has shaken itself free of ancient good that has become uncouth and stale and has leaped into a larger inheritance of light and joy.

But this thrust out of bondage into the freedom of the spirit, and its stirring history, is meaningless except the drama be re-enacted upon the plane of the personal life. The growing point of life is the individual spirit; and it is only as we push out the frontiers of light in front of our own doors that we are true to the genius and spirit of life. There is something that the Scriptures call the glorious liberty of the sons of God; and that liberty is the condition a man achieves when he turns and says to his bound mind, Go forth; and to his bound heart, Go forth; and to his bound moral sense, Go forth; and to his bound will, Go forth. And nothing short of this rounded freedom is implied in the Christian redemption. The word redemption is borrowed from the slave-market;

it contains the picture of a slave being bought into freedom; and the freedom of which it speaks is a freedom of the whole man, in every part of him.

1. *The Bound Mind*.—Say, then, to the bound mind, Go forth—forth out of the enclosure of a static orthodoxy into the region beyond, where God is still revealing and fulfilling Himself in ways that eye hath not yet seen or ear heard. This does not mean that we are to repudiate our inheritance from other days. On the contrary, we shall look upon the creeds, the traditions, the institutions which the past has handed down to us and say: These are the landmarks of the road by which the human spirit has travelled hitherto; on that same road we take our way. And by that experience of the past which is embodied in these things we shall test our own journey. We cannot be true to the future if we are false to the past. Tradition is a great and priceless treasure; yet the true place of tradition is behind us, not in front of us. We build upon the past. The genius of the spirit of life spoke in John Robinson, when he said to the departing Pilgrims: God has still more light and truth to break forth from His holy word. And this is true, not only in religion but in every part of life, in its economics, its politics and its art.

¶ The special struggle in our day is a struggle for truth. We who have been bold to call ourselves children of light, shall we not boldly join hands with all who are struggling towards the light? Shall we not be willing and ready to lay aside every weight—not only every hindering possession or habit, but every vain endeavour to bind the truth of God by human formularies and definitions—and unreservedly trust to the living teaching of the Spirit for ourselves and others, ‘looking for God in holiness, that we may behold His power and glory’? ¹

2. *The Bound Heart*.—And say to the bound heart, Go forth. William Blake used to say that the intellectual leaders of his day had fixed ‘limits of opaqueness’ to their minds—intellectual abstractions and formulations through which it was impossible to see light. And foolish and disastrous as that may be in the region of the mind, it is even more so when

¹ Caroline E. Stephen.

they gave fixed 'limits of opaqueness' to their hearts. For there is no spiritual impoverishment so deadly as that which follows the denial of love—hate, prejudice, jealousy, envy, any of those tempers which separate us from our brethren. Men fence themselves round with pride of birth and pride of place; others barricade themselves behind pride of race, or nation, or religion—and so starve their own spirits. For life takes its own revenge upon those who are grudging of their love. There is an old Indian proverb which says, 'There are always people on the other side of the hill'; and, for the most part, we leave them there. Yet there must be room in our hearts for these people on the other side of the hill if we are to be true to life. Policies of exclusion, of isolation, attitudes of hostility, of contempt—these are denials of the Spirit of life. Just as a stone cast into a pond starts a circling ripple that expands until it breaks on the far shore, so our love should go out in ever-expanding waves of comprehension and charity.

¶ Herbert Spencer devised a sort of stopping with which he filled his ears when he wished to shut himself away from a company and retire from any part in their conversation. His biography offers abundant evidence that he was equally successful in more costly forms of self-imprisonment. There was a strange contraction of his sympathies, and his relationship with the pathetic needs of man was more irritable than helpful.¹

¶ 'Remember,' Gladstone warned his fellow countrymen in an eloquent passage—'Remember that the sanctity of life, in the hill-villages of Afghanistan, among the winter snows, is as inviolable in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own. Remember that He who has united you as human beings in the same flesh and blood has bound you by the laws of mutual love; that that mutual love is not limited by the boundaries of Christian civilization, that it passes over the whole surface of the earth, and embraces the meanest along with the greatest in its unmeasured scope.'

3. *The Bound Moral Sense*.—But also let us say to the bound moral sense: Go forth. 'Except your righteousness transcend the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

¹ J. H. Jowett.

There is perhaps little that binds men like the habit of conventional goodness, a traditional virtue, and it was in that bondage that Jesus found the good people of His day. We have in our turn developed a kind of legalism, and goodness to us is very much an affair of rules and prescriptions. There are some things that we should do and other things which we should abstain from doing. Goodness is essentially a standardized affair, and because the standard is ever before us we tend to a uniformity of conduct. It may be admitted that this conventional standard of conduct is a vast improvement in quality, in sanity, and in humanity upon the morality of the Pharisees, yet the fact remains that our standard is beset by the same fault as that of the Pharisees—namely, that it is a standard. The New Testament idea of goodness is that it is an inner impulse that will express itself in all sorts of original and creative ways as the various occasions and contingencies of life may require. It is not a set of rules, but an independent and self-directing spirit; and it has a wisdom of its own that makes it equal to every emergency, and a resourcefulness that enables it to do the right thing in every crisis that it meets.

¶ Dr Lynn Harold Hough, in one of his volumes, recalls a story of an old Negro who wore a long black coat on which the Ten Commandments were embroidered in many colours; and he remarks that many people who are too intelligent to exhibit as grotesque a figure as that, are, morally, on the same level. Their ethical loyalty, he observes, gets into their speech, but it never gets into their hearts. There are likewise very many people whose religious loyalty gets into their formal customs but does not effectually get into their enthusiasms, or their social relationships, or their dominant purposes. They keep the forms of righteousness but, to recall Donald Hankey's phrase, they do not bet their lives on God.¹

4. *The Bound Will*.—The heaviest and the most tragic of human chains is sin. It binds our wills so that the good we would do we do not, and the evil that we would not that we do. Yet here, as in every other region of life, the old word holds. To the will bound by ancient entail of sin and in the toils of evil habit, say, Go forth. And it may, by the mercy of God,

¹ J. M. M. Gray, *Concerning the Faith*, 38.

go forth here and now, free as the day. Once there came a Man into this world, when it was shrouded in darkness, when life was hedged round by 'limits of opaqueness' everywhere. And through that gloom He carried the torch of Himself, that lighteth every man, liberating mind and heart, moral sense and will; and that no man should doubt his freedom, He carried the flame of life to the last 'limit of opaqueness' and overthrew it; He came to the dark, cold frontier of death, and did not pause until He had shattered that ancient fastness of darkness and had come through on the other side. The Cross is the great charter and the Resurrection is the great seal of our human freedom; let us with both hands lay hold of it.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night—
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke! The dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Seeing the Walls

Is. xlix. 16.—'Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.'

IN these words the prophet refers in a beautiful way to the solicitude of God for His people. To the charge that God has forgotten them or cast them off he replies that that is impossible. 'But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.' The peculiar expression about graving them on the palms of His hands is a reference to a religious custom which prevailed among Semitic peoples at this time. When a man dedicated himself to the service of a particular deity, or a particular cause, he often cut the image of the deity or the name of the cause into his flesh as a sign of his devotion. The thought of the text, therefore, is this: God has written the name, or marked the likeness of His people, as it were, upon the palms of His hands, so that they may always be present to His gaze, and His hands

ready to work out their good. 'Thy walls are continually before me'—this means that God always has the picture of an ideal Jerusalem present to His mind's eye, and that He will not fail to build it when the time is ripe.

Those people who were saying, 'Jerusalem is now in ruins,' were forgetting that the real situation is not what we see upon the surface, but what God sees, and what He in holy and prophetic moments reveals to us in measure. The real fact about any situation or about a human soul is—what it is worth to God. And this is the work of God—to make us believe, to make us see things and see ourselves and one another as He in His infinite hopefulness sees us all. Where we see ruins, He sees the walls.

1. 'Thy walls are continually before me.' That is the very heart and being of God. It is the insight and passion of love. God believes. He does not despair; He waits on and on.

What if God were to become discouraged over us, as well He might? What if He were to become impatient of this old world which has taken such an infinite time to learn the very alphabet of heaven? What if He were to turn His back upon us and let us alone? Ah, well: He does not. Now that Christ is of us, He will not. He lives by faith—yes, by faith in the Son of God who gave Himself for us all. He sees something coming. He sees man, the prodigal son, coming back and home. He believes that a world which has once seen Christ can never permanently be satisfied with any life which that Holy Face condemns. God is love. He is the Great Believer. He sees things that are as though they were not: and things that are not as though they were. He loves us all for the sake of something which He has never seen—for the sake of our possibilities. Once only, according to the great doctrine of our faith, did God ever see the ideal realized, once only did His great hope for man find its response. But once is enough for Love; the hint is as good as the whole. For the sake of Christ who appeared once in our flesh, He bears with all that He must see in us and in the world.

As a mother bears with a wayward child, believing in something which, though she sees no sign of it, she hopes one day to see; as her love holds out in after days when, it may be, the years have failed to realize that good which

she dreamed about her boy; as she still sees him in her mother's heart, not him as he is, but him as he might have been, him in the light of her desire; as she still protests that her child is something more and something better than has ever appeared; as she never really gives him up as bad, as lost; or if she gave him up would in that hour cease to be his mother according to the spirit; so God, our Father in Heaven, abides us all, endures the awful disappointments of time, in the hope that some day the sin, the madness, will pass out of our blood, and in the train of Jesus Christ we shall come home to God.

In the great charity of God we are not simply what we are in our mere performances. We are also what we are in our lonely protests—in our tears and agonies and cries. We are not merely what we are in our feelings about ourselves; still less are we altogether what we may have given the world cause to consider us. We are really what we are to those who love us. We are really what we are to that holy and loving God whose face man saw for one tremendous moment in the Christ of history. Let us, therefore, go on to believe, and let us act as though we did believe, that in that same great charity of God, we may, through Christ's eternal intercession, even yet recover the lost provinces of our souls, may yet become, both now and through the ages, all that God saw in us as possible, all that He dreamed of us when He decreed us being, and set us our task in the world of spirits.

¶ When Peer Gynt, who left his native place in disgrace, comes back an old man, he is obsessed with a question he cannot abandon: 'Where have I, Peer Gynt, been all these years?' He means Peer Gynt, the unspoiled, the unfallen who sprang from the thought of God: where has that Peer Gynt been through all the years? He hears the voice of Solveig, who had been his sweetheart when a boy, singing that the summer may pass and the next winter too, but he will come again. Though blind, she feels it is he when he draws near: and he asks her the question that has been occupying him. 'Oh, that is a question easy to answer,' says Solveig. 'Where would you look for that Peer Gynt but in the heart of one who loves him?' And when he replies that that is just an idea of her own, that she was its mother, Solveig says something

than which nothing could be more profound: 'Granted I am its mother, who is the father, who put the idea into my head? God.'

2. 'My hope,' said Frederick Denison Maurice, 'is not in my hold on God, but in God's hold on me.' Let us keep before us that we are here to be as like God as we can be. We are to imitate the faith of God. We, also, are to see 'the walls'—God's completed purposes—ever before us. Everybody sees the ruins. It needs no great qualification to see difficulties. It is the mark of God's calling to see 'the walls.' We have nothing to do with times and seasons or with events; we have only to do with duties.

We cannot see 'the walls': let it be enough that God sees them, that Christ saw them. For ourselves, the proof that the walls are coming is that He has given us the instinct to build.

This vision is ours when our hearts are pure. There is an old legend of the Middle Ages of a pilgrim who, as he passed through dark and silent forests, saw before him a great cathedral, even heard the solemn and happy music of it. But as often as his own heart became confused with doubt, or lost its beautiful balance through the disturbance of some private sin, the vision perished, the music ceased, leaving him in the pathless forest, surrounded by the ancient darkness and natural despair. So the pure in heart see God. But let us begin to build if we would be sure of 'the walls.' In every matter into which God comes, those who merely look on see nothing.

And above everything, let us keep in touch with the Master; in communion with that great Soul of faith and hope and love; in communion with that atmosphere of miracle and triumph which caught into a kind of glory the first apostles. For what man once saw, he may still see. The power of that vision is still there, still somewhere, if we will only seek it with our undivided will, with our undistracted confidence.

Kings as Servants

Is. xlix. 23.—'And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee.'

THE prophet is speaking to a people who are in exile. And what have kings meant to these

captive Jews? They have been the symbols of an alien tyranny. They have been the despots before whom they have marched in degrading bondage. To this disheartened little people kings have meant invasion, homelessness, exile.

But now a prophet arises among them with power to pierce the immediate gloom of brutal circumstance. He is a prophet of hope, endowed with sight and insight. In glowing imagery he foretells their return to their native land. With a wealth of pictorial setting he portrays the blessedness of their restoration. The parched ground is to become a pool. The desert is to rejoice and blossom like the rose. The crooked is to become straight, and the rough places plain. And as for kings, those grim symbols of tyranny and oppression, this is to be their fate: 'kings shall be thy nursing fathers,' nourishing and cherishing the people they had spurned, 'and queens shall be thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee.' Such is the prophet's imagery, and such is the interpretation of his quickening vision. Kings are to become servants: ancient tyranny is to wear the apron of the slave.

Our circumstances have no likeness to the condition of these exiles, and yet it is not altogether a remote land of legend and dream. Something analogous happens on our road also whenever our life is governed and ordained by God. There are kingly and despotic things on our road, grim presences which hold us in paralyzing servitude, but their alien power is transformed into an ally whenever our life passes into surrendered fellowship with the Lord. The tyrannical kings become our servants, and in vital religion we discover our own sovereignty and freedom.

1. *Pain* is one of these kings, and he is a king with an almost endless domination. Every hospital is one of his palaces. Is there any home where he has never crossed the threshold, and over the lintel of whose door you could write the amazing words, 'Pain is unknown here'? He seems to brook no exception. We are all dragged within his sovereignty, and we are all stamped with the impress of his iron rule. Amid all the crumbling thrones and trembling monarchies of our day Pain still maintains his sway.

What can we say about him? We can say

this, that he can be so controlled that his tyranny becomes a ministry, that his oppression is leagued with service, and that he is compelled to leave infinitely more than he takes. In the fellowship of God, Pain becomes our nursing father, and his directed and appointed business is to cherish and nourish the precious life of the soul. This is not to say that when we become the friends of God Pain loses his sharp implements. The sharp tool is made to carve some exquisite bit of tracery in the essential character of the soul. He is not deprived of the power of giving pain. He is not bereft of his sword, but it is changed into a ploughshare. He is not robbed of his spear, but it is transformed into a pruning hook. In the wonderful appointments of God's will Pain becomes a servant and ambassador of grace, and all he does is connected with a higher purpose which he is unable to defeat. He is made to serve the virtue of endurance until our fortitude has all the splendid strength of an oak. He is made to serve the virtue of tenderness, and we acquire that gentleness of touch whose tapping opens anybody's door.

¶ Lady Victoria Buxton was struck down suddenly, a lovely young wife and mother, in February 1869, and held fast by 'searching and exhausting pain' till July 1916. Forty-seven years of pain. And yet her life was one of valorous patience, forgetfulness of self, service to others; and such a sense of light was about her that after she had passed a daughter could write: 'Was she helpless, always in pain, bound wearily to couch and chair? If it was so, it is not suffering and sadness that speak of her. Rather it is the beauty of sunshine and roses, the shimmer on the river, the blue haze on the summer sea. These things speak of her, not those others.'¹

And this is to be brought about in the friendship and companionship of God. There was a man of the name of Paul who was greatly troubled by Pain, for he was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh. 'And I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me.' And did it go? No, it did not go, but it remained in the guarding alliance of the Divine grace. 'And the Lord said unto him, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' And so the thorn remained. Pain retained his sway, but it was all directed to the

¹ Amy Carmichael, *Rose from Brier*, 177.

enlargement and enrichment of the Apostle's spiritual treasures, and in the fullness of his wealth we are privileged to share to-day.

2. Another king on the road is *Mammon*. He has a number of aliases, such as Money, Property, Possessions, but it is the same despotic power beneath them all. Our relationship to this tyrant is not determined by our account at the bank. It is not a matter of more or less. One man may have an income of a thousand pounds a week and he may be gloriously resisting the despotism of Mammon, while another man may have an income of five pounds a week and yet be piteously and completely under his sway. If we had the requisite powers of discernment, and if we wished to estimate how far anyone had become a victim of the tyranny of money, we should have to apply a sort of level-test to their life. We should have to bring the soul and the money into the same plane of vision, and then compare their different levels in relation to each other. Which is on the higher level, the soul or the money? Which is upper, and which is under? What is the attitude of the soul when it looks out upon gold? Is the posture one of homage, or is it one of command? It is in this way that the crucial question resolves itself into a test of levels, and attitudes, and points of view, and angles of vision. Where is Mammon in relation to our souls? Is he on the throne, or is he kneeling at our feet?

The peril in the tyranny of Mammon is this—he never displays his tyranny, and he snares us into bondage on the plea that he is leading us into freedom. In a certain very subtle way he hypnotises his victims, and in their unnatural sleep he marches them into his thralldom. Mammon does not coerce, he allures. At the beginning money is our highway, along which we are marching to something else; in the feverish quest it becomes our goal. We begin by making money for finer ends, we end by making money. We make money, and that is all we make, and we are unmade in the making.

Such appears to be the tyranny of King Mammon. He hypnotises his victims, and no Pied Piper of Hamelin has ever had such multitudes in his train. And how he mocks his retinue! He creates desires which he never fulfils. He gratifies us with the outer shows of

things, but he is all the while consuming our virtue, just as the white ant eats out the inner pith and pulp of great trees, and leaves only the bark, the seeming forms of trees, which a single night's tempest can blow into dust. 'Money,' says Emerson, 'often costs too much.' And indeed it does! We gain it at the cost of our moral and spiritual freedom.

¶ A missionary once described to me a volcanic eruption and earthquake of which she was an eye-witness in the New Hebrides. A volcano some miles distant was in eruption and the air was electric with fears that an earthquake would follow. Each laid hold of his most prized possession, ready to rush to the seashore, to be evacuated in the waiting boats. The expected happened. The whole hill back of the city, against which the city was built, split wide open. Part of the city was submerged, and the sea began boiling. They fled to the shore. The last boat was about to draw out, when they yelled to a woman who stood holding a bag of yams to leave the yams and jump into the boat. They could not take both. She stood hesitant for a moment and then refused to give up her yams, and the boat pulled out. They got away just in time, for the land sank into the sea, and the last thing they saw was the woman going down under the water, but still clinging to her yams. To give the picture a modern setting, substitute for the ignorant South Sea Island woman, holding on to her bag of yams, the intelligent business man holding on to his money-bags and letting God and life go. The time comes in every man's life when he has to decide whether there shall be money-dominance or God-dominance in his life.¹

Let us begin all our reasonings about this tyrant with one clear word of the Master: 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' How then? Why, make Mammon serve God! And that is the transformation which is effected when we are living in intimate friendship and communion with God. So think of money, and so make money, and so use money, that all the while it shall be as a nursing mother—it shall feed and vitalize every offspring of your spirit which makes you the kinsman of your God. There is no more wretched sight on earth than the slave of money. On the other hand, there is no more noble sight than its master.

¹ E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Mount*, 195.

3. There are many other tyrannical kings on the road of life. There is a very imperious monarch whose name is Temptation. He is as despotic and cunning as any we meet, but, like every other tyrant, he falls upon his knees when we confront him in the presence and authority of the Lord. But let us just name one other king whose gloomy approach darkens the road as with the fall of night. Among all the kings on the road there is none more imperious than *Death*. Every movement about him is kingly, even when he comes with gentlest steps. In all the sublime pictures in which Watts portrays the presence of Death, however tender Death may appear, and however light his touch, there is an air of authority and command about him which seems to leave no right of appeal. He is a mighty king. Is he a necessary tyrant of our souls?

There are some arresting songs of emancipation in the Bible which suggest that the singers had looked into the eyes of the tyrant and found that his tyranny was broken. For example, here is one believer in the Lord, and his word seems to be filled with something like a taunt, as though he were now playing lightly with an ogre which he feared in early days: 'O death, where is thy sting?' What can the adder do without its sting? Here is a king who has lost his power to despoil and destroy, and all that is now left to him is the power to befriend the pilgrims he once terrified, and lead them into the sweet intimacies of home, and into the all-comforting love of their Father in heaven.

Jesus Christ has some strange things to say about King Death. He speaks of him as though, in some mysterious way, his tyranny is so buried in service that the dreadful thing is never seen. Where is he in this word of our Lord—'He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die'? The secret is here—the tyrant is lost in the servant, and his terrors are swallowed up in the blaze of immortality.

¶ There was no fear, no regret at the approach of death, not much sense that death had to be reckoned with. He had been overheard to say to himself, that he had 'come to the River, and *there was no River*,' which agrees exactly with Mr Greatheart's rule, that 'you shall find it deeper or shallower, according as you believe in the Lord of the place.' It is very noticeable that, years before, he had spoken of just such

a dry-shod passage. In an address which he gave at the West London Mission, he said, 'I hope I shall not soon forget the resurrection sweetness that I instantly knew when I felt that I had really died to self. It seemed so proper a foretaste of the passage into the world which is to come. . . . *How wonderfully small a thing death may be; not a river, but a rill, scarce ankle-deep, across which we may step into the Glory-land beyond.*'¹

There is one King on the road, 'and on his thigh this name is written, "King of kings and Lord of lords."' It is in His strong, sweet friendship that we find the right of way, and every other king will bend to do us service.

Words to the Weary

Is. 1. 4.—'The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary' (R.V.).

1. THE passage from which those words are taken may be regarded as the Second Isaiah's account of the qualifications necessary for the making of a prophet, and so, perhaps, it may be fairly taken as an account of the ideals he cherished for his own ministry.

The function of the prophet, he says, is to be a voice for God. He is God's mouthpiece, making eternal things his theme, and judging all the events of everyday human life from the Divine standpoint. He is not a fore-teller, in the sense that his main concern is with future events; he is a forth-teller, bringing God's will to bear upon the present and the now. That is essentially and fundamentally what the prophet is—and the modern representative of the prophet is the preacher—he is God's voice to men. The preface to his message is ever this: 'Thus saith the Lord.'

But if the message of the prophet is to be effective, if it is to strike home to the hearts and consciences of men, then behind the voice there must be a life. What a man says, or rather the effect of what a man says, always depends upon what he is. They used to say of the elder Pitt that there was more in the man than in anything he said; while, on the other hand, they used to say that a certain flippancy and insincerity of character robbed the brilliant

¹ J. Rendel Harris, *The Life of Francis William Crossley*, 211.

efforts of Sheridan of half their influence and effect. According to the profound insight of the Old Testament, speech is not the expression of a few thoughts of a man, but the utterance of his whole life. A man blossoms through his lips; and no man is a prophet, whose word is not the virtue and the flower of a gracious and a consecrated life.

I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose
life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause.¹

But there is at least one other requirement which must be fulfilled before a man becomes a prophet. Before even a good man can speak for God he must listen to Him. That is the point emphasized in this passage. 'The Lord God,' writes the prophet, 'hath given me the tongue of them that are taught . . . he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught.' No man can speak for God without first of all listening to Him. Communion is the condition of effective speech. Our Lord's healing of the deaf and dumb man is full of instruction for us upon this point. The first command Christ issued was not 'Be loosed' to the tied and halting tongue; but 'Be opened' to the closed and stopped ears. Then when his ears had been opened, the bond of his tongue was loosed and he spake plain. First the listening, then the speaking. And no man can be a prophet who does not first of all listen. If he ceases to listen he will begin to spin little talks about little topics out of his own little brain, and men will miss the deep, profound, Divine notes that reach the depth of the soul.

And all this Isaiah was himself. He was God's voice to the exiles. He lived what he preached. And he said nothing which first of all he had not received from God Himself. To the people he was a teacher; in his relation to God he was a learner. And amongst other things he had learned from God was this: he had learned how 'to sustain with words him that is weary.' He had learned how to cheer the despondent and encourage the hopeless.

2. The ministry of comfort makes up a large, if not the larger part of the Christian minister's

service, and unless a man has learned how to sustain with words him that is weary he can never, in the fullest sense, be a Christian minister at all. This is not to say that it is the *whole* of the Christian minister's duty. There are other things besides comfort that are necessary.

There is a ministry of *intellectual enlightenment* to be discharged. Our Lord discharged this ministry Himself. Men went to Him with their doubts and difficulties, and He opened to them the Scriptures. The Gospel stands for enlightenment, and no minister makes full proof of his ministry who does not seek to help his people in their intellectual perplexities and doubts.

¶ There is more staying power in a ministry which gives theology an important place than in a ministry which lives from hand to mouth, to which the last nine days' wonder is the breath of life. It is not theology that has wearied people; it is the insufferable tediousness, the dry-as-dust pedantry with which it was often presented that has wearied out the patience of the long-suffering hearer. There is always room for a ministry which will patiently and sympathetically unravel the tangle of men's thoughts on the deepest things. For men do think on them even if they have ceased to look for light from the Church.¹

Then there is a ministry of *rebuks*. The minister must not be always saying soft things. There come times when his words have to be as sharp and stern as his Lord's always were in the face of hypocrisy and sin. No minister makes full proof of his ministry who does not speak to his people as plainly as Paul did to Felix about sin and self-control and a judgment to come.

¶ 'He was to me,' wrote Miss Cable, 'the man with the measuring-rod. He never spread a bed of roses for sleepy saints to lie on, and allowed no brimming orthodoxy to pass muster for rightness, purity, and honesty in the sight of all men. I have never left his church on a Sunday morning without a twinge of conscience that I came so far short of the pattern he upheld.'²

No, comfort does not make up the whole of the work of Christian ministry. There is a season for everything, and as the Authorized

¹ A. S. Peake.

² John Stuart Holden; *A Book of Remembrance*, 51.

¹ Cowper, *The Task*.

Version puts it, it is 'in season' the Christian minister has to learn to speak his word to the weary. But the season, after all, is pretty nearly every season, for the 'weary,' the burdened, the bankrupt in hope, are always with us.

¶ Dr John Watson held that the chief end of pastoral preaching was comfort. 'Never can I forget,' he writes, 'what a distinguished scholar, who used to sit in my church, once said to me, "your best work in the pulpit has been to put heart into men for the coming week." I wish I had put more.' No preacher spoke more to the heart of his people; and yet, after he had resigned his pulpit at Sefton Park, Dr Watson, in a series of articles in *The British Weekly* on 'It Might Have Been,' reviewing his ministry of twenty-five years, regretted his failure in this particular, and said that if he had his life over again, he would have made his ministry a more comforting one.¹

By the 'weary' the prophet does not mean the physically tired and worn. The 'weary' whom he has in mind are the people who are weary in soul. In his particular case they were those exiles who had lost heart, who despaired of a return, and who believed they were doomed to exile for ever. And these are the 'weary' to-day—the people who have lost heart; the people who feel life's load too heavy for them; the people whose spirits are wounded and crushed by sorrow. And the 'weary' in this sense—the people who are worn and burdened by sorrow, by temptation, by sin, by fear—are everywhere. At one time or another we all find ourselves enrolled in their ranks. And the real test of a religion, of its value and worth, is this: Can it minister to the diseased mind? Can it bind up the broken in heart?

It is easy to speak a message of cheer and good hope to the vigorous and strong. Plato, Confucius, Buddha, all have a message for the noble and the good. Plato, for instance, can build his ideal republic if you will allow him to select his material as a dyer does his wool. Let him have cultured, refined, virtuous, well-born people to work with, and he can create what he believes would be an ideal state. But it is only the 'fit' he wants; Plato has no use for the poor and the ignorant and the vicious and the sinful. The 'weary' folk—he can do nothing with them. Indeed, it was very much

like that with Judaism also. Judaism could make use of the morally righteous, but it had no message to the broken and the outcast; it could do nothing with publicans and sinners; it abandoned them to their fate—'this people,' it said, 'that knoweth not the law, is accursed.' But it is the glory of our Christian faith that it can minister to the 'weary,' that it can succour with words the tired and the broken, that it can breathe new hope into the bankrupt and the despairing.

¶ It has been said that Christianity is a progressive religion; to me its distinctive feature is its regressiveness. It is the only religion which goes back to gather up the lost things—the things which have fallen by the way and have been left behind. Jesus claims as His own prerogative that He came 'to seek and to save that which was lost!' His distinctive glory is regressiveness. He alone goes back to the forest of humanity to seek the children that had lost their way. All the rest are professedly pressing forward—Brahman, Buddhist, Parsee, Greek, Roman. All their messages are for strong souls. Jesus alone has a message for the weak.¹

3. Jesus still makes the old appeal: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' The people who labour and are heavy laden, the weary folk—what a multitude of people they are! What are the chief causes of weariness? Well, perhaps these: trouble, sin, death.

'Man is born to trouble,' says the Bible, 'as the sparks fly upward.' And beneath the burden of it men stagger and faint. Read the story of Job: it is the story of a man 'weary' with trouble. But Jesus knows how to succour with words him that is weary. What is the trouble? Is it sickness? 'Afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' Is it loss? 'Be not anxious,' He says, 'what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink—your Father knoweth.' Is it bereavement? 'Fear not,' He says, 'in my Father's house are many abiding-places.' And many a weary soul, succoured by the words which the Lord has spoken, has lifted up his head.

And there is *sin*. At bottom, it is the one source of weariness. This is what really constitutes the ache and pain and burden of life—

¹ A. S. Hoyt, in *Homiletic Review*, ix. 32.

¹ G. Matheson, *Studies of the Portrait of Christ*, i. 109.

the consciousness of guilt and shame. This is what embitters our present and makes our future a dread. This is what makes us conscious of being at enmity with ourselves and at enmity with God. But Jesus has a message for the sinner : it is the message of forgiveness and restoration and a Father's love. There is no sinner for whom He has not His word of comfort to speak. Let none say he is too low or base as to be beyond the comfort of the gospel of Christ. 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from *all* sin.' 'From *all* sin !' The despairing publican, smiting upon his breast and crying, 'God be merciful,' becomes transfigured, as he listens to the words of Christ, into a rejoicing saint.

His name the sinner hears,
And is from sin set free ;
'Tis music in his ears,
'Tis life and victory.
New songs do now his lips employ,
And dances his glad heart for joy.

And then there is *death*. In that final weariness only Christ can speak words of comfort and cheer. But He can. He can so sustain with His words him that is weary that, amid the swellings of Jordan, he shall be unafraid.

¶ Someone spoke to Dr James Hamilton, as he lay dying, about the 'dark valley.' 'Dark valley ?' he said, 'there is no dark valley here.'

God speed you ! workers for the right and good,
And when your star of hope burns low and dim,
Give you endurance born of dauntless faith
In the all-compassing, celestial powers
Who work through you for righteousness and truth.

God speed you ! give you His own royal gift,
'The tongue of learners,' and 'the wakened ears,'

That from your lips may flow the golden speech
Which succours weary ones and lifts to God.
God speed you ! O ye helpers of the world,
The dawn is breaking, night will soon be past,
Be strong for God and truth.¹

Backing our Prayers

Is. li. 9.—'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.'

Is. lii. 1.—'Awake, awake ; put on thy strength, O Zion.'

'AWAKE, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord !' That is the cry of an exiled people to their Lord. 'Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion !' That is the reply of the Lord to the supplicating people. A people cry to their Lord to awake : the Lord cries to His people to shake themselves from their sleep. The Divine response is a sharp retort. Thou art crying out for more strength ; but what of the strength thou hast ? Thy prayer is the supplication of a man who is not doing his best ! Clothe thyself in thy present powers, consecrate thine all to the purpose of thy prayer, and stand forth in battle array.

Prayer is not a talisman to be used as an easy substitute for our activity and vigilance. Prayer is a ministry in which our own powers can be quickened into more vigorous and healthy service. God has given us certain endowments. Certain talents are part of our original equipment. We are possessed of powers of judgment, of initiative, of sympathy ; and the primary implication of all successful prayer is that these powers are willingly placed upon the altar of sacrifice. Any prayer is idle when these powers are indolent. If we are pleading with the Lord for more strength, it must be on this ground, that our present strength is well invested. Is it not true that there are many burdens which oppress us, both in the individual and the common life, and we fervently supplicate God for their removal, but we do not consecrate our strength to their removal ? We too frequently pray to be carried like logs, and it is the Lord's will that we should contend like men ! If we would have the reinforcements, all our forces must be on the field. The condition of all efficient and fruitful prayer is the consecration of all our strength towards the answer. 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord !' That prayer is legitimate and wonder-working if we are ready to co-operate with the spirit of the Lord's reply, 'Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion.'

1. The principle is this—our 'strength' must back our supplications. Is the backing always

¹ J. E. Livock, *Songs and Lyrics of the Inner Life*, 43.
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present? Take the matter of *our personal salvation*. A number of professedly Christian people are gathered together in the common name of the Christ. Everyone is conscious how immature he is in the Divine life. We know how dim is our spiritual discernment. We know the flabby limpness of our spiritual grip. We know how few and infrequent are our brilliant conquests, and how many and common are our shameful defeats. And again and again we supplicate the Almighty: 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!' Is it possible that the response of the Lord may be the retort of the olden days: 'Awake, awake, put on *thy* strength, O Zion'? We pray the Lord to make us finer men and women, and to lead us on to purer heights, but how many of us put our 'strength' into the climb? We are so prone to divide the old psalmist's counsel, and to pay heed to one part and to ignore the other. '*Bring unto the Lord glory!*' And so we do! But it is a maimed and lifeless offering if, with the glory, we do not bring our strength. '*Bring unto the Lord glory and strength!*' It is in this gift of strength in our personal religion that we are so woefully deficient. We need to bring to our religion more strength of common-sense. Why, if many men were as thoughtless and haphazard in their business as they are in their personal religion, they would be in the bankruptcy court in a year! We need stronger service in the matter of our personal salvation—more inventiveness, more fertility of ideas, more purpose, more steady and methodical persistence. And we need to bring a more commanding strength of will.

¶ 'Prayer is no good to me,' said a great friend the other day. 'I pray to be moral. When temptation comes I fall as easily as ever.' I said: 'Now be perfectly frank. When you pray to be moral, do you mean that you never want to be immoral again?' He hesitated before replying, and then said: 'That's a pretty tall order.'¹

2. Take the matter of *the salvation of the home*. There is not a father or mother who has not, in some form or another, commended their little ones to the blessing of Almighty God. We have had our fears. We know how soon the wanderings can begin. We know how easily a perverse bias can be given to the

plastic will. And we have interceded for them at the throne of grace: 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!' Is it possible that the Divine response may be a sharp but loving retort: 'Put on *thy* strength'? Are we putting our 'strength' into the salvation of the home? Is the moral and spiritual pulse in the house strong, vigorous, and healthy! How many of us have said to ourselves, in calm but intense determination, 'God helping me, this home shall be mightily favourable to the making of Christians! Not to the making of prigs, but to the making of strong, healthy, wholesome, chivalrous saints!'

¶ There never was a better pattern of a home than Charles Kingsley's, but he brought his strength to its creation. It was a home whose moral atmosphere was like the air on Alpine heights, a home in which, in all perplexities, the only referendum was the Lord Himself, a home all of whose ministries were clothed in grace and beauty.

¶ 'A strong plea in defence of family prayers' was Lord Curzon's description in the House of Lords of the last letter to him by Lord Roberts, within a few days of the great soldier's death. The words of the letter were: 'We have had family prayers for fifty-five years. They bring the household together in a way that nothing else can.'

3. And, lastly, there is the matter of *social redemption*. We are all familiar with the disturbing presences in the common life; the wretchedness which wraps people about like a chilling and soaking mist: the moral pestilence; the sin which flaunts its nakedness, and the sin which clothes itself in the garb of virtue; the sorrow that cries, and the sorrow that has no cry; the clean and the grimy poverty; the omnipresent pain. How often have we prayed for the city: 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!' And still there comes the Divine retort, 'Put on *thy* strength, O Zion!' We abuse the privilege of prayer when we make it a minister of personal evasion and neglect. The prayer of the lips is only acceptable when it is accompanied by the strength of the hands. Are we supplicating for the removal of burdens when already we ourselves have strength to remove them? Let us look about us. How is it with drunkenness? Can we honestly say that we have put our strength into our attack?

¹ Geoffrey Gilbert, in *The Daily Express*, 15th Nov. 1928.

To put on one's strength may just mean to put off one's coat! Will anybody assert for a moment that we have put our strength into the business, and by negative and positive ministries sought the sobriety of our people? How is it with gambling? We all admit it to be a subtle disease in the body politic, secretly consuming the manhood and the womanhood of the realm. We all admit its ravages, among peer and peasant, the millionaire and the pauper. It is well to appeal to the arm of the Lord, but have we used the strength we have? Can we truthfully say we have used the weapons we have, and they have broken in our hands, and are altogether inefficient and useless? Do we not know that if to-morrow we were to make the publication of betting news illegal, one half the gambling in the land would cease? And how is it with poverty? The grim, gaunt thing is in our midst, squalid, ominous, terrible! 'Yes, where is God to allow it?' 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!' 'Where is God to allow it?' There is a prior question: 'Where are we to allow it?' 'Put on thy strength, O Zion!' Have we put our strength into it, every ounce of it? It may be that, when we have done all, something of drunkenness may remain, and something of lust may remain, and something of poverty may remain; but what a plea we shall have with God, and how mighty will be our supplication, when we can come to Him and say: 'O God, our armoury is empty, our reserves are all called out, our last man is on the field, our ammunition is spent, and the enemy still boasts himself in our midst! Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord!' That kind of prayer would shake the very heavens, and we should have as our eager and willing allies the innumerable hosts of the eternal God.

¶ Everybody in this room has been taught to pray 'Thy kingdom come.' Now, if we hear a man swear in the streets, we think it very wrong and say he 'takes God's name in vain.' But there's a twenty-times worse way of taking His name in vain than that. It is to ask God for what we don't want. He doesn't like that sort of prayer. If you don't want a thing, don't ask for it. . . . If you do not wish for His Kingdom, don't pray for it. But if you do, you must do more than pray for it; you must work for it.¹

¹ Ruskin.

And so let us never forget that, when we pray for the salvation of the world, it is implied that we will put our strength into the cleansing and sweetening of our own little corner of the world. There is no true prayer without a full consecration.

The Cup of Trembling

Is. li. 22.—'Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again.'

THIS beautiful and touching expression relates to a specific and definite act of God in the experience of His people which has had important results for the higher well-being of all mankind. The piece of writing which contains it is a little poem in blank verse, complete in itself, which has somehow been inserted right in the middle of these sections about the Suffering Servant, though obviously it does not belong to them. Why it has been put here we do not know, unless because it has so much to say about suffering. Suffering is here described as a cup to be drunk, a frequent scriptural image for this experience. In verse 17 we read: 'Awake! awake! stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out.'

1. It is not difficult to discover what this cup of trembling was and very accurate and powerful the description is. These people had for generations been exposed to every evil which a cruel oppressor could inflict; the Babylonian conqueror had subjected them to every humiliation and misery. The prophet says that it was really God who had given them this cup to drink. The word 'fury' here is unfortunate and it does not properly convey the spirit of the original. In order to get at that we must expel from it all suggestion of vindictiveness; it only means God's unsparing discipline of pain. That is what these poor people had for so long been having to endure. And note the vividness of the metaphor—'trembling,' literally staggering, or reeling. The idea is that these poor, wretched folk have been drunk with trouble and anguish of spirit, lost all power of standing up against their fate, been utterly overcome by it. So intense have their sorrows

been that they have lost their senses under them; all strength and resolution have gone out of them; they are prostrate, stupefied, insensible to any high stimulus of interest and desire. Is not this a remarkably felicitous figure of speech whereby to express what so often happens when the human heart is overwhelmed with grief and pain and is for the time being incapable of feeling anything else?—every nerve a scorching flame, every movement an agony, thought and will paralysed, brain and soul reeling in the awful intoxication of woe. The cup of trembling is exactly the word for it—the cup of reeling, the cup that drugs and inhibits all the finer faculties of one's being in the sheer collapse of all power of resistance to the overmastering onset of sorrow.

2. There is no subject on which the human mind is more exercised to-day than that of suffering. It is only comparatively recently that the subject of suffering as such begins to occupy a large place in men's thoughts about life in relation to God. At the present time the baffling question of the why and wherefore of the pain of the world, human and sub-human, constitutes a great obstacle to a simple acceptance of belief in God. And from our standpoint to-day it does indeed seem strange that this same question should apparently have left our fathers comparatively undisturbed. They said a great deal about sin, and about the wretchedness of man's lot on earth as the consequence of sin, but it never seemed to occur to them that pain and sorrow were in themselves a serious indictment of the benevolence of the Creator, or that they called for any consideration apart from the prior problem of human wrong-doing. Feeling as we do to-day, this is an almost inexplicable thing. If we go back and interrogate the pagan thinkers and writers of ancient Greece and Rome, we do indeed come upon plenty of clear perception of the miseries of life, but not much sympathy for them; that again is in a special degree modern. One must be careful not to make these generalizations too sweeping; one has to admit individual exceptions and qualifications; but, on the whole, suffering constitutes a problem for us to-day in relation to faith in the goodness of God such as it never did to the generations of old. The attention we are giving to it is the result of the long operation of the

Christian consciousness within human society, though it has taken a good while to make itself thus manifest; it is perfectly evident to any careful reader of the Gospels that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself was full of sympathy for the pain of creation, and that in fact this sensitiveness sharply distinguished Him from the religious leaders of His time and race.

We find the Buddha two millenniums and a half ago addressing himself to a similar mood in India. That great teacher was much less concerned to find a remedy for sin than to find one for suffering, and he came to the conclusion at last that there was no escape from the latter except by escaping from consciousness itself. But Jesus went deeper into the heart of things than the Buddha ever did when in His own experience He revealed to mankind the sacredness of sorrow.

3. How many there are who can enter with full knowledge into all that is denoted in this one short graphic phrase—'the cup of trembling'; it just gathers up into a single term what every stricken heart knows of itself. Pain indeed is part of the price we pay for our humanity. And when God calls us to be 'conformed to the image of his son' that growth cannot be without effort and suffering. We cannot get rid of the old self without pain; the Spirit cannot win in the battle against the flesh without the whole personality being sometimes almost shaken to pieces.

¶ 'Do you know,' says Lammenais, 'why it is that man is the most suffering of creatures? It is because he stands with one foot in the Finite and the other in the Infinite, and is torn asunder, not by four horses but by two worlds.'

There are experiences of life which shake us to the very core of our being. It need hardly be said that they are not experiences that we would choose. It may be that it is years before we have come to recognize that what was at the time a very painful and even terrible experience has worked out in the wise and loving plan of God to high ends, which during the time of suffering it was altogether impossible to anticipate. We have gone through, it may be, a prolonged and very painful trial, which as long as it endured tested all our resources of patience and faith and love to the very depths. Yet now we can witness to the worth of such experience. We know that if what could not

be avoided we accepted as from God, as part of His great scheme of love, if we took that cup from His hand and allowed Him to use an experience which we could not control ourselves, we are richer and more serviceable to-day. That cup of trembling will be worth while if we drink it in the presence of Him who did not thrust away His own cup, it will taste otherwise to us than if He had not drunk the same.

¶ Dr Albert Schweitzer, in his first book, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, speaks about 'the fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain.' We know from his devoted work what an understanding fellowship it is, that it can be the highest and closest fellowship in the world, because the head and centre of it is Christ Himself.

4. There is a singularly beautiful promise attached to the text. The prophet represents afflicted Israel as a person lifting to his lips the cup which has already made him drunken, and God as tenderly stooping and taking it out of his hand. Thus saith thy Lord, 'Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling . . . thou shalt no more drink it again.' The immediate occasion of this promise is, of course, that of the deliverance of the Jewish prisoners from their long Babylonish captivity, and it was before that deliverance had actually taken place. How comforting!—'thou shalt no more drink it again.' The promised blessing was realized the day when the thirty or forty thousand emancipated pilgrims left the city of their bondage and set out on their journey homeward. It was to them a day of immense jubilation. And it is probable enough that, despite all the difficulties and dangers they had yet to encounter before their national life was reconstituted on its ancient soil, they never had reason to give way again to depression and despair. They had made a fresh beginning; for them all the world had been fashioned anew.

Perhaps the most terrible element in any sorrow is the feeling that the thing which causes it is final in our experience, that the cup will never pass away from our lips. If we could know for a certainty that we would never have to drink that cup again, that what we feel to be irretrievable in relation thereto is not irretrievable, that the hopelessness of ever getting out of the dungeon wherein we are now

immured is quite a delusion, would not that very fact go a long way to comfort us? To be sure it would. Well, that is the truth about it; we shall never have to drink that cup again once it has done its work. God needs sorrow or He would not use it; it is written in His very nature and our own that it must be experienced, or there would be an ingredient eternally missing from the glory of His love. But it is not the last word in the universe; the Cross is not the final fact in the mystery of being; it is joy that is the ultimate; God Himself is essentially joy, and joy must ever break triumphant from the heart of pain. This is the great Christian hope, the brightest promise of the gospel of atonement. 'There shall be joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' The cup of trembling is the cup of fearing. Take fear out of any dark experience and most of its power to hurt is gone. Shall we not let our heavenly Father take that cup out of our hands for ever? Then the angel of God's peace will find a way to our heart. Then the joy of the Lord will become our salvation, our strength, and our song.

In the heart of the cyclone tearing the sky,
And flinging the clouds and the towers by,
Is a place of central calm.
So here in the rush of earthly things
There is a place where the spirit sings,
In the hollow of God's palm.

Bearers of Good News

Is. lii. 7.—'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!'

WHAT lies behind these words is an imagination of Zion, once a queen envied and magnificent, but now a ruined, childless city, gazing with patient hopelessness along the road by which her sons were led away. Jerusalem is set about with hills, and on their edge the sentinels had often seen against the sky the spears and banners of invaders; but one day—and the heart thrills at the thought of it—one day the weary Zion shall see upon these mountains a courier, running like one who has great news to bring. Before he comes near enough to speak,

the heart of Zion has divined the meaning of his haste, and hope springs up to meet him. And, as she waits for confirmation of her own surmise, it seems as if in all the world there could be no pleasanter sight than that tired runner, whose every movement tells that God, so long withdrawn, has come again in kindness.

The Apostle Paul, for whom everything connected with his ministry had the colour of romance, caught at this phrase as descriptive of the Christian preacher. Sorrowfully it has to be confessed that, for both speaker and hearer, preaching has often been a prosaic matter of official duty and outward form; but all the more do we turn to the ideal of it, where eagerness is seen on both sides because of the greatness of the theme.

1. What meets us first in the words is *an imagination of the hearer*. We are a race who wait; for the earth, with all its bounty, cannot hide from us the sense of something which has not come. The world is rich in kindness and in interest. We know the zest of work, we rejoice in the goodness of friendship, but not less do we find on everything some touch of elusiveness, as if it did not give us all that it promised. Men are not to be taken too seriously in the account which they give of themselves; for, behind the show of contentment with life as it is and their preoccupation with work and society, there is something else which, in hours of naked feeling, is betrayed. There are longings in men of which they themselves are unaware, but at a word they leap into clearness. There are men who have remained throughout a lifetime among low things, without the wish, without the power to climb; and yet, when the word of emancipation comes, it is welcomed with a childlike gladness, as if they too—these earthbound, secular creatures—had been waiting, like spirits in prison, for the word that should set them free. That is the unanimous witness of those who have worked for men; and it surely tells of a race born with eyes though born in the dark, with an endowment wealthier than any use to which they yet have put it.

Men do in the depths believe in God; and though His word has not yet found them, they believe that it will come and will be good. And that is what makes preaching hopeful; for the men, whom God has made, are waiting.

2. But next, in these lines we have *an imagination of the preacher*; and the figure needs little explanation which discovers the peculiar beauty of the messenger in his feet. Other qualities a preacher may have, but in the eyes of needy men, this is first—that he hastens. He comes as one who has something to say which his fellows will be glad to hear, and he is content that other gifts and commendations should be forgotten in that. 'It is required of a servant,' says St Paul, 'that he be found faithful'; and the preacher's first business is to see that he does not interpose anything of his own between his hearers and the good news which he has brought. As Dr Denney says, he is not a diplomatist, free by negotiation to secure as much as he can of his proposals, but a herald; his business is not even to prove, but to proclaim, the gospel.

¶ Ruskin distinguishes low art from high in this way: 'In all base schools of art the craftsman is dependent for his bread on originality; that is to say—on finding in himself some fragment of isolated faculty by which his work may be recognized as distinct from that of other men. . . . But in all great schools of art an artist is praised not for what is different in him from others, but only for doing most strongly what all are endeavouring.'

That does not, in the least, mean that preaching is to be impersonal, a lesson taken over from another and repeated without any personal impress. St Paul often speaks of 'my gospel,' by which he meant the good news as the peculiarity of his experience had enabled him to see it; it is what Jesus Christ meant in particular to him. What gives vital energy to preaching and gives it power and impact is that the word should have a life behind it, that the gospel should have taken shape anew in the heart and thought of a believing man.

The preacher is set between two constraints which may seem to impel him in opposite directions. He has to come down to the ignorance and slowness of men, he must try to see inside their minds and talk in their many dialects. He may have to keep something in reserve, making use of half words until he is free to use whole words; and in all this he is following the example of his Lord. He must become all things to all men, although in so doing the temptation waits for him of meeting

men half-way, and modifying the message which he bears.

But there is another constraint which comes in to keep him right. 'How shall they preach,' says Paul, 'except they be sent?' They are sent; their business is Christ's business, and success crowns them when Christ and men are face to face. If we know what salvation is and what human sorrow is, we shall always find pleasure in the thought of the wideness of the proclamation. Much preaching, it is true, aims at nothing and achieves nothing; but in every kingdom under heaven to-day tired souls are being cheered by gifts and messages from the Son of Man; and wherever He speaks impossible things are done: comforts arise in the midst of distress, order and quietness come into the life of hurry, and men grown hopeless rejoice in the assurance of redemption. Hearts grow simple, the evil get clean desires, the selfish come to know the dignity and sacredness of life; these are the works of Jesus by His word, and it is because of them that men have revered the office of the messenger.

3. Again, the text offers a suggestion as to *the character of the gospel*. 'Many things are true and, on occasion, salutary and important, which are not, in strictness, gospel.' One great mission preacher says, 'I remember how my heart grew hot as one speaker after another stood up and spoke about the wages of sin and the like, but I heard no gospel preached. These stern truths were not to be forgotten, but other things needed to be said first.' The very word *gospel*—good tidings—suggests the need of variety in presentation, for the conditions of life may have driven men into an attitude in which what is good tidings for others may seem too light and sanguine for them. Here, in the poet's mind, is the image of this despairing, forsaken city—what kind of word does she need to raise up her heart and make the world about her new? Here are men whose life is spoiled because their hearts are sullied and they cannot recover cleanness, what word can change their mood? Here are women whose days are one long ache, what word can give them light enduring? A gospel must be judged by the situation, and if the trouble is deep it must be deeper yet. It must be *good* news to make the mourner sing for joy, and it must be good *news* that does not affront the ancient troubles of

the heart by the sense that it has been heard before.

¶ Tolstoy, in one place, describes his own experience in going on a charitable errand to an appalling lodging-house in Moscow, and letting drop to the landlord some word of indignant pity for the inmates. 'No sooner had I spoken, than over the partition which did not reach the ceiling there appeared the dishevelled, curly head of a woman, with small, swollen eyes and a shining red face; a second, and then a third head followed. They were evidently standing on their beds, and all three were stretching their necks and holding their breath and looking silently at me. The student with me, who had been smiling before, now became grave, the landlord cast his eyes down in confusion, whilst the women continued to look at me with expectation. . . . It was like the valley of Ezekiel's vision when the bones began to move. I had uttered a chance word of pitying kindness, and it seemed as if they had only been waiting for it to cease to be corpses and to become alive again. And now they seemed waiting for some further word at which the bones would be covered with flesh and receive life; but I felt, alas! that I could not continue, for I had no such words of power to utter.'

The prophet fancied that the best news which he could bring to troubled men was the assurance that 'God is King.' He uses other words—it is good tidings of good, of peace, of salvation, but what these all lead up to, and where they leave the mind is this—thy God is King. It had seemed as if God had withdrawn Himself from Israel and from the world, and life was left without a plan; neither from the fortunes of their nation nor from their lot as individual men and women could they gather the assurance that He cared. They knew that they had sinned with their fathers, but it seemed as if on them had come the gathered burden of that ill desert. But now, in a single incident, there came the assurance for which they had waited; it was a bare fact in history, a change in imperial policy towards a subject race. The king of the East, who had held the people captive, was now to let them go. A bare event!—Yes, but in that event they caught a sight of God, which made the whole world new. Care, doubt, fear no longer could oppress them, when they saw that God had interposed, for

that meant that God had forgiven. The burden which had lain upon their heart—the sense of ill desert, of isolation, of exposure—now fell away at the tidings of this great event, which assured them that they had a Friend, and that He was pacified towards them.

No cloud across the sun
But passes at the last, and gives us back
The face of God once more.

To get back the face of God—to know that He who is righteous and who cannot look on sin is our Friend, that He cares and will protect—that is to receive the gospel.

In what is essential, men of to-day are near of kin to those of Zedekiah's age. There is among them little actual aversion from good, and there is a great deal of a sort of helpless good intention. People mean to be kind and honest and clean, but their intentions do not always find effect. They blunder and the blunder remains; they lose their freshness and cannot recover it: and troubles come, bitter and blinding. Friends talk to them in ways of consolation, but it is all words, for when they stretch out their hands in the dark no hand grasps theirs. What they need above all else is the assurance, coming home to them with unchallengeable force, that God is alive and King, that He can turn back the course of a life and give a man a new heart, that He is able to make men quiet and strong in any sorrow. That assurance still comes in the form of an event, an episode in history. It often seems as

if He did not care for our good intentions, but here we find the measure of His concern; 'God so loved the world,' it is written. And hearts that have drowsed and grumbled—conscious of fault but finding no escape from it—have started broad awake at the witness of this fact, and have left their sin behind; and men grown spiritless because no one cared have kindled up their courage and gone to be the messengers of hope to others, because of this living love of God. There is no true preaching except that which Paul has named 'the word of the Cross,' for in it men gain assurance as to what is in the mind of God. And it is God we need to meet, not Jesus of Nazareth, a gracious and winning figure in history, but the very God in whose hands our life is. We need to see clearly, not in the pleasant fields of Galilee, but in our perplexed life to-day. Peter, that great lover of Jesus, yet says of his Master—'Through whom ye do believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.' Nothing makes the world new for a man like the assurance that God sees, and God cares, and God controls. That is to get back the face of God again.

And so the world of men has been cheered in age after age by the tidings borne across the centuries of this tremendous incident, in which all of God, the Unchanging, is revealed. When rightly told, it is ever a word of good news; and in all ages no spectacle has appeared to troubled men more welcome than the messenger who tells of Jesus Christ.

VANGUARD AND REARGUARD

Is. lii. 12.—'The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward.'

How do you regard human life? I suppose the three most frequent descriptions of life, the three most popular pictures, are these—a battle, a voyage, and a march.

Many have spoken of it as a battle. 'For my own part,' declared William James in a famous passage, 'I do not know what the sweat and blood and tragedy of this life mean, if they mean anything short of this. If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it

is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it *feels* like a real fight.'

And many have spoken of it as a voyage, the passing of a ship across seas which to-day may be as smooth as glass, and to-morrow tossed with a hurricane—on and on, till the harbour lights appear on the other side and the desired haven is won.

But the picture which doubtless has the widest appeal is that of life as a march. We

talk about 'the milestones of the years.' We put our ear to the ground and we hear the tramp, tramp, tramp of the hosts of humanity. We turn the pages of history and we see the cavalcade of the sons of men. Life is a march.

Many of the greatest spirits who have ever lived have taught us to regard it so. John Bunyan for one, with his immortal pictures of the road beaten bare by the passing of pilgrim feet. Thomas Carlyle, for another. Some of you will remember the page in *Sartor Resartus*, one of the most glittering, thrilling pages in English literature, where he pictures the generations rising out of darkness into daylight, each living out its brief entralling day, and then plunging back into the dark again, each (as he puts it) 'hasting stormfully across the astonished earth,' each leaving 'on the hardest adamant some footprint stamped in,' so that 'the last rear of the host will read traces of the earliest van.' You have it again in Matthew Arnold in that glorious poem *Rugby Chapel*—the picture of mankind marching in long, interminable column across the face of the ages, many of them straggling and falling out, many growing faint and dispirited, but still the march going on, and still the column pressing forward :

On, to the bound of the waste,
On, to the City of God.

And you have it in many of the greatest hymns of the Church, many of the songs we sing together to rally the courage in the depths of our souls :

Through the night of doubt and sorrow
Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Singing songs of expectation,
Marching to the promised land.

That is the history of the sons of men. That is our own life to-day—with the milestones hurrying by.

And that is Isaiah's picture here. Only—mark this—he has added something to it. He has added something most dramatically important. Carlyle spoke of the last rear of the host reading traces of the earliest vanguard. Isaiah has a far more glorious vision than Carlyle. 'That vanguard on in front,' he says, 'that is *God*—God at the head of the host—the spearhead of humanity's advance! That rearguard following after,' he continues, 'that,

too, is *God*, God coming up behind, God holding the post of danger at the army's rear!' That is Isaiah's vision—'Onward goes the pilgrim band,' with God in front, and God behind, and your marching soul in the midst, encircled by God, barricaded in by God, surrounded by God as by a wall of steel and iron. And that is the promise that rings out deathlessly to cheer us on our way: 'The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearguard.'

1. The Lord our vanguard! Has not that been your experience on the road? Can't you look back to-day and put your finger on place after place, and say, 'Here, and here, and here I was "to grace how great a debtor"—here and here God had prepared the way for me'?

Take the longest view. Look back on the whole course of your life. Has not God always been beforehand with you? And if you love Him to-day, is it not because He has always loved you first?

Think of the surprises His love has so often prepared for you. At birthdays and Christmas seasons you prepare surprises for the children and those you love. You smuggle things into the house. You keep them locked away. You guard your secret well. And then, when the happy morning comes, you bring out the thing you have prepared, a glad, loving surprise. Is not that what the great Father of heaven does times without number for His children? Is not that half of the magic of this life, that it is so full of the thrill of discovery—and all because a God of love is going on in front?

Or turn from the joys you have had, and think of the sorrows. Think of the frustrations, the griefs, the disappointments; and see if you cannot say, looking back upon them now, that even in those things grace was present, even there God was leading on, with a definite plan for your life.

There is an historic incident from the story of Oliver Cromwell and John Hampden, those two stalwart makers of England. It was in the days when they were still almost unknown. So utterly weary and impatient had they grown of the way in which king and court and government were ruining the nation and bringing it down to decadence and disaster that they decided there was only one course left for them to take, and that was to leave the country and never set foot in it again. Memories of the

Mayflower's intrepid adventure kept urging them, and their thoughts turned longingly to the new colony beyond the seas where the winds of freedom blew and life was clean. One day news came to them that a ship, lying in the Thames, was shortly to make the Atlantic crossing. Quietly and unobtrusively Cromwell and Hampden took their places on board. Everything was in readiness for the long voyage; the two men had shaken from their feet the dust of the land whose downfall they lamented; when, at the last moment, messengers dashed up with orders from the king that on no account were they to be allowed to sail. Baulked and frustrated and angry at their fate, Cromwell and Hampden came ashore: it was the ruin of their hope. But it was that ruin that gave Cromwell to England, and shaped the subsequent course of history. Had not God, even in the wreck of the man's plans, being going on in front?

And can you not say the same of sorrows that have marked your way—things, perhaps, that once came near making you ready to 'curse God and die'? And yet to-day:

I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned!

'We love Him, because He first loved us.' He has always been first. He has been 'the Lord our vanguard.'

And therefore (this is the point we have been making for), a brave heart to the passing milestones—greet the unseen with a cheer!

We talk about 'the unknown future'; we say timidly that we have no notion whatever of what may be coming to us. It is not true! 'But surely,' protests someone, 'it is true. We can't tell what a day may bring forth; we don't know one single thing about what may be on there in front.' I say again—It is not true. One thing I know—*God* is on there in front! One thing I can say—Whatever that future is going to bring forth, it is going to bring us God. *The Lord our vanguard—that I know.* And is not that enough?

That brave, shining light of the Church of England, Studdert Kennedy, in the last book he wrote before his death, a book called *The Warrior, the Woman, and the Christ*, described the moment when real religion was first born within him. He was alone at night on a moor

beside the sea. Above him was the great black dome of heaven, and a million stars. There was no sound but the boom of the waves against the cliff. He was alone; and yet he was acutely conscious of a great, vast, mysterious presence—the spirit of the universe—moving there in the dark. He felt that night as he was to feel on another later occasion, when he lay by himself in no-man's land between the trenches and watched a moving figure coming towards him, not knowing whether it were friend or foe. Suppose he whispered, 'Who goes there?' Would the answer be a bullet, or a friendly word, or silence? Just so he had felt on this night alone on the moor beside the sea. Suppose he cried out to that mysterious spirit of the universe, Who goes there? Would there be any answer? Or would there be nothing but the boom of the waves, and the whisper of the wind in the heather? He decided to risk it. He made his cry, 'Who goes there?' And in that very moment his soul got his answer. And the answer was one word, 'God!' And from that hour he knew, and believed.

Here are we to-day, with the dark mystery of the veiled future confronting us, wondering (as it is perfectly natural to wonder) what is moving there for us behind the veil, joy or sorrow, friend or foe, success or failure, life or death. But if you stand to-day, and cry into that black mysterious void, 'Who goes there?'—you'll get your answer. 'God goes there! Love goes there. Your Father is there!' And again I ask you—Is not that enough?

'The Lord will go before you'—whatever else is hidden, that is gloriously certain. God our vanguard!

2. But glorious as it is, that does not finish Isaiah's picture of the march. With sudden, dramatic imagination he has added this—'and the God of Israel will be your rereward.'

It is almost certain that here the prophet had the story of the Exodus in mind. Israel had escaped from Egypt; across the open desert the angel of God was leading them; the pillars of cloud and fire were going on before: when suddenly from the rear of the marching host a terrible cry was raised—'The Egyptians! We are pursued! Egypt is on our track!' and there on the southern horizon was the cloud of dust, where Pharaoh's chariots and horses were steadily drawing nearer. And again the cry

was raised—‘The destroyer is after us! He is gaining ground. What shall we do?’ And then comes the most wonderful touch in the story. ‘The angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them.’ Is it not a glorious picture—God coming in to hold the rear and fight the rearguard action, God Himself coming down like a great divine barrage that the destroyer could not pass?

Do you see the parable for us? ‘The God of Israel will be your rearguard.’ For if the Christian life is an onward march, it is also a rearguard action. Old forsaken things, whose bondage we thought was broken, come hurrying after. They come so near sometimes that you can feel their hot, foul breath upon your soul—old slaveries, stubborn temptations, strong, masterful sins.

Has a man, in some high hour of gladness, given Christ his heart? The devil does not take a reverse like that lying down. He does not say, ‘I am sorry to lose you—but if your mind is made up, that settles it. Good-bye!’ No. He begins the pursuit. It may be he will never stop pursuing. It may be that never till the gates of heaven have safely shut behind that soul will the pursuit of the Egyptians cease. Whyte of St George’s was once describing the way in which the bloodhounds of temptation and remorse can sometimes haunt the soul. ‘You may be saved,’ he cried, ‘but they will pursue you up to the very gates of heaven, and leave the bloody slaver of their jaws upon the golden bars!’

The soul’s enemies pursue. And sometimes (God forgive us) we almost want to desert, and go over to that pursuing foe.

But what happens? Just what happened to Israel. ‘The angel of God, that went before the camp’—give that angel his right name now—‘the Christ of God, who went before, removed and went behind.’ The Lord our rearguard!

And can’t you see Him—Christ, with the sword of His Spirit, holding the rear of our march, barring the way of our hereditary foes; so that, try as they like, they can’t get at us? Blessed Jesus, ‘Thou hast beset us behind and before’—our vanguard and our rearguard!

‘But,’ as John Bunyan put it, in one swift, poignant phrase, ‘but not without great

danger to Himself—which made me love Him the more.’ Let us remember what it has cost God to keep the rear of our onward march, and the terrible price of that rearguard action to Jesus.

There was an hour—a grey, grim, terrible hour—when Napoleon in Russia, finding Moscow burnt before him, and his supplies fast running out, faced round westward to begin the long retreat to Paris. He summoned the man he could count on best, the brave, gallant Marshal Ney. ‘I appoint you, my Marshal,’ he said, ‘to command the rearguard. You are to keep the Russians back from the main body of my army. You are to be the breakwater between us and the deluge. You are to block their advance at any price, till I extricate my men from this trap of death and get them home to France.’ And Marshal Ney promised that he would do it. He drew his troops into line and slowly, grimly, they began to fight their way back, taking on themselves the full weight of the Russian march of death, enduring indescribable things from wounds, and frost, and famine. So the terrible days and nights wore past. And then, it is said, one day long afterwards, when some officers were playing cards in their quarters in Paris, the door of the room opened, and there stood before them the most dishevelled figure they had ever seen, old and bent and emaciated, his clothing tattered, his hands trembling, and lines of terrible suffering carved deep into his features. ‘Who are you?’ they cried, startled. But suddenly, to one of them, there came a flash of recognition. ‘Why,’ he exclaimed, springing to his feet, ‘it’s the Marshal! It’s Marshal Ney!’ And the others rose, and saluted. ‘Tell us, Marshal,’ they said, when they had conquered their astonishment, ‘tell us—for we have been wondering—where is the rearguard?’ And the bent, broken figure squared his shoulders a moment, and looked them in the face: ‘Sirs,’ he said, ‘*I am* the rearguard!’ And it was a fact. He alone had seen it through.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this that is red in His apparel, and His garments stained in blood; this whose visage is marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; this from whose head and hands and feet sorrow and love flow mingled down? This is the Christ. ‘*I am* the rearguard,’ says Jesus.

And when you think of the onward march of humanity to-day, and when you think of your own soul's march from the past into the future, remember there is not only a God on in front there, leading the way: remember there is also Something behind, Someone facing backwards down the road you have travelled; and His arms, as He gazes back to the foe, are stretched out wide, wide as the Cross of Calvary—wide as the world those arms are stretched, to bar the way. O blessed, suffering, gallant God—Thou art the rearguard!

And therefore, soul of mine, march with courage! Into the unseen days, march singing. Past the milestones of the years, keep marching. March till your road begins to dip towards its end, and the towers and turrets of the City appear beyond the river. God is your vanguard, God your rearguard. Therefore sing—and march!

J. S. STEWART.

Behold, my Servant

Is. lii. 13-15.—'Behold, my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Like as many were astonished at thee, (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men,) so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand' (R.V.).

THE passage from the thirteenth verse of chapter fifty-two to the end of chapter fifty-three stands by itself and is really a poem. Its subject is the Suffering Servant of the Lord, and it stands closely related to other poems by this great prophet of the Exile concerning this same Servant of the Lord. To all of these it gives the crown and finishing touch. Who this Servant is, or what the picture of him in the mind of the prophet represents, is one of the problems of Biblical theology, but this much we may take for certain, that the idea in the prophet's mind, like so many other Biblical ideas, was one which underwent a process of development, and that in this poem we have its last and highest stage. There can be no doubt also that when he first uses the name 'My Servant,' the prophet is thinking mainly of the people of God—Israel, or the righteous remnant of Israel—and depicting their needs and sorrows and joys. But as his thought pro-

ceeds the personification becomes more complete, until it culminates in this great passage which deals with the people of God as with a single Person, who still remains, however, typical and representative of the people of Israel—a point which is extremely important for the right interpretation of the passage as a whole. Of course it is most difficult for us to divest ourselves of the Christian atmosphere in dealing with it, but if we can at all succeed in transporting ourselves to the standpoint of the ancient Jew, what strikes us is the contrast between this Servant of the Lord and the other familiar portraits of the Messiah drawn in the Old Testament. We have here surely the work of the Spirit of God through the conscience of one who is among the sanest and most spiritual of His prophets. As we read between the lines and trace the growth of the great idea we can almost feel the resistance of the prophet's own mind to the strange new light which is dawning upon him.

And in the end we know there was revealed to him something of the strange process of discipline and sacrifice by which God should carry on in His people the revealing and redeeming task which He had begun in them. Before the mind and conscience of the prophet there hovered in dim outline the figure of one who should bear this burden of sacrifice, the Servant of God and man, great in his humiliation and in his exaltation alike, the chosen instrument by whom God's purpose should be fulfilled and His Kingdom come.

There is one grand historic figure whom these words recall. As they were written not by imagination merely but by conscience, so it is to conscience that they appeal. That they have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, and that even with curious correspondence of detail, no one now denies. But their fulfilment is something more than a coincidence or an historical curiosity. At the back of all he wrote there lie principles which are the principles of God's working always and everywhere, and an appeal to conscience that is universal in its power. We do him therefore no injustice when we use his words to aid us in more closely understanding Him in whom they were fulfilled.

1. There is *the personality of the Servant Himself*. He is regarded not as a passive agent in the hands of God or of destiny, but as

an efficient and active force, with the full initiative of a Person. At the very least this means that the fulfilment of God's redemptive purpose will come about, not by means of a new law or revelation or covenant, but through a Person who is Himself equal to the great task, and who in some fashion more or less inexplicable is representative of the whole people of God. In other words it is a foreshadowing of the doctrine of the Word made flesh. And this ancient appeal of the prophet contains a truth which is deeply needed by the men of to-day.

The Incarnation is to us the guarantee of the Divine personality. Until we know God as a Person we do not really know Him at all. To regard Him as a law, a tendency, a moral impulse, a spiritual force, is to lose ourselves in mists of vain speculation.

As Pascal says, 'If the entire physical Universe conspired to crush a man, the man would still be nobler than the entire physical Universe, for he would *know* that he was crushed.' It is this personal self-consciousness which makes our human nature infinitely great, and we must find this raised to its highest power in God, if He is to become the object of our worship or win us to Himself. And apart from the revelation in Jesus Christ we have no sure knowledge of God as any other than an impersonal force. The truths of Christianity are great and striking and its doctrines are interesting historical documents, but behind them all, as that which has given to them their power and vitality, is the Person of Jesus Christ.

¶ 'Detach Christianity from Christ,' writes Canon Liddon, 'and it vanishes before your eyes into intellectual vapour. . . . Christianity is non-existent apart from Christ; it centres in Christ; it radiates now, as at the first, from Christ.'

Read in the speech of to-day, the message of the prophet to God's people in the hour of their need is a message for all time. They out of the darkness of their captivity were looking for the fulfilment of God's promises and for the restoration and reform of His people. They sought a fresh covenant, a more binding law, a new Jerusalem, a Theocracy established in men's hearts. But the prophet, with a deeper insight and a truer instinct and inspiration, had to tell them of a deliverer, one who could stand between the people and their sins, and bear the burden of their age-long forgetfulness

of God. They looked at the end, he rather at the means; and so he spoke to them words of suffering and sacrifice and service, as the only way which would lead to that victory of which they dreamed.

Much the same has to be said to an age like ours. We, too, look for God's Kingdom to come on earth, for larger opportunities and bettered conditions and a brighter lot for the sons of men. We, too, know something of a bondage that is none the less real that it is not always material, and we long for the liberty of the people of God. And we, too, are directed, not to any new social programme or scheme of betterment, but to a Deliverer, to one who shall save His people from their sins.

It is the force inseparable from a great Personality, the witness of a loving heart as well as an omniscient mind, which gives the shattering and quickening effect to the words of Jesus Christ, and which causes His teaching and work to shine forth through the mist of the dead languages in which it is shrouded as the means of eternal life for the men of to-day. And it is the Person of Jesus Christ evidenced to men in the reality of their own experience, and not merely as some distant memory, that still awakens their enthusiasm as nothing else has power to do.

It is here that we find the universal note of our religion. Were Christianity but a new philosophy or a rule of life, or a system of Divine decrees, it must have remained provincial and defined. But where it bursts all bonds of race and class and speech and clime is that it points men to a living, loving Person.

¶ The Muhammadan venerates the memory of the prophet, the founder of his religion, and studies the Koran, the sacred book which he wrote. But he never thinks of Muhammad as being now a living power in his life, as a person with whom he can still come into close relationship. He may make pilgrimages to the prophet's grave, but it is to a grave he goes, and in that grave are the ashes of the prophet. The position of the Christian is entirely different. He worships and follows a Living Christ, who exercises a present influence on him, who can be his friend and companion and give him power and help. The Christ of Palestine is no mere historical Figure; He is the Christ of the twentieth century.¹

¹ V. F. Storr, *What It Means to be a Christian*, 13.

Subtlest thought shall fail and learning falter,
Churches change, fanes perish, systems go,
But our human needs they will not alter,
Christ no after-age shall e'er outgrow.

Yea, Amen ! O changeless One, Thou only
Art Life's guide and spiritual goal,
Thou the light across the dark vale lonely,
Thou the eternal haven of the soul.

2. First the Servant Himself is held up before us in His Personal exaltation. Now we are told that *His exaltation is by suffering and sacrifice*—the coming Servant of God must needs suffer, His discipline and sacrifice were necessary to what he had to do, and through them men would be brought to see and understand what otherwise would be difficult if not altogether inexplicable.

The fact that Jesus Christ suffered gives all its strength and grip to His gospel and shows us the reason why it still holds and sways the lives of men. Just as a harp's strings must be stretched to the breaking-point before it can give out its full music, so suffering puts a new song into men's lips and a new harmony into their lives. This is a truth men do not like to face. They think that God sent people into the world to enjoy themselves; they say, with a modern writer, 'You enter into the ideas of the Eternal through laughter and not through tears.' Or they complain, with a modern poet, that they are not as the animals are, who 'never lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,' and who never have 'to worry about their state and their duties to God.'

Of course if men are content to be as the animals they may hold such views as these. But not even the most airy cynicism can wholly hide the dread secret of our sorrows, the deep sad moan of our humanity. To most of us life is not all sunshine and merry-making. Pain is real enough and sin no less real, suffering comes and we cannot evade it, and death has meant to most a world of aching desires and burning regrets—a veritable valley of the shadow. And a religion which does not fairly and frankly face these hard facts is no religion for us.

¶ When Marie Bashkirtseff was told she had consumption, she bade the doctors blister her chest as they liked, but said she could put on pretty bodices with lace and flowers to hide

the ugly marks; and she went on singing, dancing, flirting and amusing herself to the end, trying to ignore the deadly thing that was killing her.

We may not agree with all the various forms in which men have described and accounted for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But that does not affect for a single moment the main point, which is, that men 'have joy through His sorrow and life through His death.' We can hardly conceive a Saviour who could be equal to our deepest need unless He were also one who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And when we take sin into account the same thing appears more clearly. We may deceive ourselves for a time, but it thrusts itself upon our attention, and the consciousness of it cannot be gainsaid. Because it is the burden of our life therefore it was the burden of Christ's. He had to face it if ever He was to become the Redeemer of the world, and it was no light and easy task. He can speak to the soul in the anguish of penitence as no other can, because He has Himself done battle with the enemy, and faced the worst that evil can do and come out in the end victorious.

Your sight of Heaven cancels not my Hell;
Your sun has only power to dissipate
The night fog, that returns with his decline:
You reassure me not: all is not well:
I house with sins that only a divine
Vicarious passion can eradicate.¹

We must not overlook the representative character of the Suffering Servant as portrayed by the prophet of old. He did not stand for Himself merely, but for the people of God. And so the office of Jesus Christ is above all representative. He is the Son of Man. He stands in an unique relation to the great body of humanity. He is profoundly influenced by the needs, the sufferings, the sins of the race. And when men come to look for the source of His power and ask themselves for the secret of His rule, they find it not in the wisdom of His teaching, the beauty of His character, the timeliness of His appearance, but in the mystery of His Cross.

And yet the prophet was right in indicating that it would also be the ground of His rejection. It takes long for men to get over the stumbling-

¹ H. B. Binns, *To an Optimist*.

block of the Cross. Those who receive and appreciate the work of the Lowly and Despised Redeemer are not found amongst the proud, the rich, and the self-satisfied, but amongst those who need to go down into the valley of humiliation, to mourn because of sin, who wrestle with doubts and fears, who know what it is to wait long and patiently for God. These will know something of the secret of the Cross.

Was Christ the Product of His Time?

Is. liii. 2.—‘For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground’ (R.V.).

ONE of the most important questions for Christians is whether or not Christ was simply the product of His time. Can we account for His spirit and character by the world into which He was born? Can we trace His teaching to any of the religions then existing in Judaism, Greece, Rome, or the East? Was it in line with the central spirit and aim of these religions?

1. *Judaism*.—Jesus was a Jew, born in Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth, of the house of David. He scarcely for a moment passed beyond the borders of His native land, a small Roman province about one-sixth the size of England, one-third that of Scotland. It was natural that the Jews, having alone received a pure worship, should think themselves the chosen of heaven; it would perhaps be beyond mere human nature not to regard other nations with contempt. And their spirit was one of extreme exclusiveness. Heathen authors speak of them thus. Their own Josephus says they despised the learning of foreign languages as fit only for slaves—the only language worth knowing was that in which their Law was written. When their Holy Books were translated into Greek, it was regarded in Jerusalem ‘as a bitter day, like the day when the golden calf was made.’ The later Rabbis laid on those who gave their sons Greek learning the same curse as on possessors of swine. The evidence might be multiplied almost endlessly; but one example from the life of Jesus shows the lengths to which this hostility towards the Gentiles carried His fellow-countrymen. When in the synagogue at Nazareth He ventured to say that prophets

of Israel were sent to a heathen man and a heathen widow, His neighbours, shocked at His impiety, attempted to fling Him headlong from the brow of the hill.

Had Jesus been merely the child of His time and country He must have shared this central spirit of His race. If so, how comes it that His teaching has passed from land to land with its universal appeal of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, inspiring its followers with the ambition of winning the world for Christ? When the Greeks wished to see Him, He saw in their desire the call to that lifting up on the Cross which should draw all men unto Him. Because Jesus is not the child of His time, He is the child of all times.

¶ The exclusive national pretensions of the Jews have long since been laughed away and forgotten, and each new decade in missionary history has furnished fresh proof that Jesus has a welcome waiting for Him in every land. No contrast in experience or civilization is sufficient to remove any people from the range of His influence; for Greeks and for barbarians, for wise and for unwise, He has His gift prepared. General Booth, in the earlier days of the Army, confessed that he was forced to make a choice; no man’s arms are long enough, he said, to reach out to give a hand to the rich and to the people of the depths. That was candidly spoken, but our Lord is not thus confined to a class.¹

But let us pursue this into further detail. In the Palestine of Christ’s day, Judaism was broken up into three sects, or sections. With the Pharisees and Sadducees the New Testament has made us familiar; the Essenes it never directly names. Let us take the central spirit of each, and ask whether one or all of them could have produced the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth.

(1) One would think that Christ’s attitude to the *Pharisees*, and theirs to Him, would at once disprove the idea that He drew His teaching from any of their Rabbis. The Gospels are full of denunciations of their righteousness. By their oral traditions they made void the commandments of God, making the Sabbath a burden, rendering it possible for a son in the name of duty to God to throw off his parents to starvation, discussing trivialities such as whether it is the temple or the gold of the temple

¹ W. M. Macgregor, *Jesus Christ, the Son of God*, 244.

which makes an oath binding. This, be it remembered, was not true Judaism. The very capacity for faithful obedience which made God choose Israel tended to produce an over-anxiety in keeping minute points of the Law, which the unscrupulous twisted to unethical ends. Christ did not accept the religion of the Pharisees as true Judaism. To Him, who came not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it, such teaching 'made void' the commandments of God given through Moses. Nevertheless, while they spun the weighty matters of the Law—justice, mercy, faith—into an endless web of casuistries—He went straight to the central spirit of all law, the spirit of love. He denounced the externality of their righteousness.

(2) Turn now to the priestly and aristocratic class in Israel—the *Sadducees*. They accepted the Law, but rejected the Pharisaic comments and traditions. In Moses they found nothing about a future life, so they denied the Pharisees' doctrine of a Kingdom of God beyond the grave, a world of spirits and angels, where men receive rewards after the resurrection. To the Sadducees the Kingdom of God was on earth, in Palestine; the reward, material prosperity, long life and abundant posterity, in which alone a man finds his resurrection. We can judge for ourselves whether Christ is indebted to them for His doctrine of the future world with its rewards and punishments, and His teaching about the resurrection. We know from St John's Gospel that it was the resurrection of Lazarus which drew on Jesus the deadly vengeance of the Sadducean priests.

(3) We come then to the *Essenes*. They were a brotherhood of Jewish monks with a reverence for the Law so great that to speak against it was accounted worthy of death. They did not go up to the sacrifices in the Temple, because their own meals were their sacrifices. They kept the Sabbath with more than Pharisaic strictness. They considered the body as impure and evil. Wine and meat were shunned; bread and water were their food and drink; marriage was forbidden among the majority of them; money was not used; property was held in common. Separation from the world, abandonment even of Israel, was the central idea of this sect. Morally it was by far the purest section of Palestine, but it refused to mix with even its own countrymen for their good.

Now, some say that Christ was a member of this community, and that from its teaching He drew His doctrines of love to God and love to man. Let us, then, compare His way of showing love to man with that of the Essenes. His first public act was to leave the wilderness, go to a marriage feast, and make wine for the guests. He sanctioned the family life and blessed little children. Again, Christ refused to allow the Sabbath to become a burden by its strictness. He discountenanced the merely ceremonial ablutions of the Pharisees. While He doubtless recognized the need for reasonable hygienic laws, He condemned over-carefulness in the matter of what it was lawful to eat and drink by declaring that a man is defiled only by the evil thoughts coming out of his own heart. He mixed freely with every class of society, even the outcasts, accepting invitations to dine with Pharisee and publican alike. Above all, the Essenes retired to the desert, abandoning a world which they despaired of saving. Jesus set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem to lay down His life for the salvation of all mankind.

No, Jesus Christ is not the product of His age and land, any more than He would be the product of ours if He were born here and now. The contempt of the Jew for others was so natural, all things considered, that we can only account for its absence in Christ by seeking for the reason in some source higher than our foolish human nature. Certainly He caused His gospel to be preached to every creature. The Pharisee made the Law a thing of letter and rule; Jesus made it a thing of life and spirit. The Sadducee denied the immortality of the human soul and made the earth all; Jesus gave to the soul hopes which demanded eternity and were themselves the earnest of its immortality. The Essene counted the touch of the world pollution; Jesus walked straight into that world, mixed with its very outcasts, laid down His life to redeem it. He stands out from His surroundings as separate and original.

¶ The contrast between Jesus and the ordinary frequenters of the Temple is shown in the fragment of an Apocryphal Gospel found in the buried city of Oxyrhynchus. Jesus is walking in the Temple when He is accosted by a priest, who reproves Him and His disciples for walking in the place of purification with

feet unwashed. 'Art thou, then, being here in the Temple clean?' inquired our Lord. He said unto Him, 'I am clean, for I washed in the pool of David, and having descended by one staircase, I ascended by another, and put on white and clean garments, and then I came and looked upon these holy vessels.' The Saviour answered and said unto him, 'Woe, ye blind, who see not. Thou hast washed in these running waters, wherein dogs and swine have been cast night and day, and hast cleansed and wiped the outside skin. But I and My disciples, who thou sayest have not bathed, have been dipped in the waters of eternal life.'

2. *Rome*.—No one has suggested that Jesus drew any part of His religion from ancient Rome; and yet, strangely enough, the thought of so doing seems to have occurred to Him. Nothing less than that is involved in the Temptation of all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Jesus aimed at the creation of a universal empire. At the time of His birth, Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, ruled over a realm which 'extended from the ocean on the west to the Euphrates, from the Danube and the Rhine to the cataracts of the Nile and the deserts of Africa and Arabia.' As a subject of this vast empire He grew up, and the evidences of its power were daily before His eyes. If, then, there came to Him there in the wilderness the almost incredible resolve to create a still greater empire, obviously He would recognize how important would be the choice of the means by which to accomplish this. Perhaps the subtlety of diplomacy, perhaps the force of armies or of miracles, would sweep the Roman tyranny away and set up the Kingdom of God. Yes, but would it be a Kingdom of God, set up by such means? The most original thing in Jesus is that He saw clearly it would be a kingdom of Satan rather, founded on the worship of Satan—as must also be our British Empire unless it be held together by freedom and by justice towards the humblest of its subjects.

Religion in pagan Rome was merely the tool of the State, valuable only as a political instrument. Lightfoot says: 'All the public offices in Rome were connected with the sanctuary of some god. The temple of Mars was the war office; the temple of Juno, the

mint; the temple of Saturn, the treasury; and so forth. Thus every official duty was bound up with some religious sanction.' And, inasmuch as the chief offices of the State were concentrated in the person of the Emperor, his deification followed as a matter of course. His effigy was set up throughout the Empire; and the refusal to burn incense to him as a god was punished with death as political treason. 'If thou wilt fall down and worship me,' said Satan. Nothing is more original than the clearness with which Christ saw that thus to entangle the Kingdom of God with the means and policies of the world involved this Satanic worship in some form—open and unashamed in the Roman Empire, secret and disguised from itself in many a church and state since. For whether the Church hold the temporal power, or the temporal power rule the Church, the confusion and entanglement are against the Kingdom of God.

3. *Greece*.—We turn next to Greece—to intellect refined to the point of beauty. The Greek worshipped the human mind, and his wisdom penetrated even Judaism, so that some think it has, in some measure, influenced the religion of Jesus. Let us take the opinion of one who has earned the right to judge. To the Apostle Paul the central thing in Christianity was 'Jesus Christ and him crucified.' In that broken, dying form on the Cross he saw the very image of God. But to the Greek, he says, this Cross, which is the wisdom of God, is foolishness. For the Greeks sought after wisdom, the wisdom of their own philosophies, and what could a crucified man be but foolishness? How could His marred form be the image of their bright and beautiful deities, incapable of suffering? Socrates declares that there would be 'great impropriety' in the gods having either joy or sorrow; and Aristotle in his conception of them shuts them up in mere contemplation of themselves. Now this, perhaps the loftiest Greek wisdom concerning the Divine nature, declares that it is the very blessedness of God that He is incapable of entering into human life in love or action. Obviously this would make the very idea of an Incarnation an absurdity. When Jesus says, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,' He contradicts absolutely this whole Greek conception of God. 'God,' He says in

effect, 'is not thus so absorbed in love and contemplation of Himself that He is incapable of loving His creatures; He is not so lifted like a marble statue that He cannot suffer in order to redeem, for it is written, "I have made and I will bear."'

4. *Buddhism*.—Let us see, now, whether Christ's religion and spirit can be traced to the East. Buddha, 'the Enlightened One,' lived nearly six centuries before Christ; and many hold that Christianity has borrowed from Buddhism its leading doctrines. There are certainly some resemblances. But the central spirit of Buddhism is pessimism and despair. The fundamental conviction is that existence in every form is sorrow. Salvation is to escape absolutely out of existence by killing out that desire of life which betrays us to continue living by the delusive hope that life will bring happiness.

That Buddhism can foster a gentle and saintly soul is shown by Kipling's conception of the Llama in *Kim*, but it is worlds away from Christian thought and feeling. The only thought common to both religions is that virtue is salvation: but by salvation Buddha meant the final extinction of life; Jesus meant 'life, and life more abundant'; Buddha meant sinking into absolute unselfconsciousness; Jesus meant rising into a more and more vivid consciousness of self in God. Buddha starts from the idea that life is a curse; Jesus from the feeling that it is a Divine opportunity. Buddha denies the possibility of forgiveness—all debts must be paid to the uttermost farthing; forgiveness is the very atmosphere of Christ's living and dying. Finally, with Jesus God is the Father, infinitely tender, compassionate, loving.

¶ I live in a city overwhelmingly Buddhist, and I have friends who have found in that faith a quieting and restraining influence of which I desire to speak with respect. But when it comes to reinforcement of human powers, not simply for a resigned acceptance of the sorrow in the world or for an ascetic life or for a passive and laissez-faire sort of goodness, but for a life unselfish, ministrant and progressive, Buddha is not to be compared for a moment with Jesus of Nazareth.¹

Christ made His religion free to the whole

¹ G. A. Johnston Ross.

world. He showed men the Father, as well as the Lawgiver. He realized that the only empire that can endure is one founded on spirit and on truth. He revealed God loving, suffering, dying for His creatures. He came in order to prove that joy is at the heart of the universe, and to give life more abundant.

Out of a Dry Ground

Is. liii. 2.—'As a root out of a dry ground.'

NORTHERN RHODESIA suffers each year from long months of drought, which begins in March and lasts on till November. During the weeks after Michaelmas, however, before any rain has fallen, a strange miracle passes over the face of the thirsty land. Everywhere, without apparent cause, the sun-baked soil breaks out and blossoms into a wonderful wealth of flowers. By such resurrections Nature still speaks to us in parables concerning the secrets of the grace of God.

1. Our Redeemer and Restorer is continually coming down from heaven and giving life to the world. Throughout the chequered history of the Church we meet with recurrences and repetitions of this Divine paradox which belonged to its miraculous birth. Again and again when Christian belief has sunk into superstition, when Christian morals have corrupted and decayed, suddenly, without visible cause or agency, new spiritual life appears and spreads and strengthens and multiplies, we know not how. About every true revival there is something incalculable and unexplained. We can never predict the coming of a great Christian reformer. Catherine of Siena appears like an angel from heaven to rebuke Papal apostasy at Avignon. Whitefield and Wesley arise without warning to reanimate the dying religion of the English people. No man is able to forecast or anticipate those secret operations whereby the Holy Ghost quickeneth whom He will.

In the history of the world there are long, dreary centuries about which chroniclers find little to record. And in every age for multitudes of ordinary people life must needs seem dull and sordid and commonplace. They meet with hardly any thrilling adventures or golden

hours of romance. Year after year they are constrained to toil on in mechanical fashion. More or less patiently they carry their appointed burdens and tramp along the familiar paths of routine. For the majority of men and women, existence means a tedious pilgrimage over dry and thirsty ground. There is only one discovery which has power to redeem it and transfigure it. But the revelation of the love of Christ is able to flood our dreary experience with wonder and gladness and glory which are not of this world.

To-day we are often tempted to lose heart when we recognize the barrenness of so much religious machinery and controversy. On one side multitudes of Christians go on 'mumbling the dry bones and munching the remainder biscuit' of tradition and ceremonial. On another side there is an extension of what has been called the 'Hard Church.' Crowds of good people are spending their strength in the effort to obtain Acts of Parliament against evil; they are invoking more inspectors and more policemen to reform the world. The late Principal Denney was himself a clear-sighted and ardent social reformer, yet he wrote: 'I feel very distrustful of the organized action of the Churches to promote legislation even for Christian ends, or ends which can be represented as Christian. . . . The multiplication of laws and the deterioration of character to a large extent keep pace with each other.' Our human laws exist to deal with crimes, not with sins. Many sins—including some of the deadliest, like avarice and pride—are not crimes at all. The arm of flesh can restrain criminals, but it is powerless to save sinners. Yet Christians know how God trusts to sheer love, and love alone, to redeem the souls whom He has left at liberty to disown and defy Him. And therefore Christians can never pin their faith to human prohibitions and suppressions as instruments for regenerating mankind. According to the New Testament, force can never put away sin; we have to look elsewhere to find the cure. As Richard Baxter used to say: 'It is because we have so few high saints that we have so many low sinners.' Our passionate hope and prayer must be that God in His mercy will remember and visit His Church, so that even amid the drought and aridity of its spirit fresh saints and apostles may once more be born.

2. The same truth is illustrated also in the individual life of the believer. Now and again the most zealous and loyal workers for Christ wake up to discover that their pathway of service has become gradually macadamized into a mere custom of doing good. Moreover, when we listen to the holiest Christians, they testify with one voice that they have had to endure seasons when their souls grew parched, hard, and flowerless as the desert sand; when they felt devoid of capacity, even of desire, for communion with their Lord.

¶ In one of his sermons on Canticles St Bernard makes this confession: 'Oftentimes, in the early days of my conversion, my heart was dried up and withered within me'; it was frozen, and the spring tarried long; 'my soul slept in weariness, sad almost to despair, and murmuring to itself, *Who shall stand before the face of His cold?*'

Against such visitations of inward drought and deadness we possess no antidote in ourselves. We can only look beyond ourselves and fasten our eyes on the sign of the Son of Man. Here is the witness of one who had been deeply exercised and instructed in the mysteries of faith: 'The Cross has become to me in spiritual things just what the felt, experienced affection of a steadfast friend becomes in natural life, a settled axiom of the soul—an already proven certainty which I rest in, without needing consciously to realize. And to the work of Christ upon the Cross I can commit and commend my whole spiritual destinies, and say, Let their weight hang there with Him, even in those frequent seasons of deadness when His very sufferings and death do not powerfully affect my feelings. Life itself will sometimes appear strangely false, dream-like, and unreal; but the fact of Christ's death remains valid. It is true for me, inalienably true, though the poverty of my human nature forbids me either to rejoice in it or to weep over it as I would. Even sorrow is a fruit which it requires some richness of soil to raise and ripen. But the Cross and faith in the work wrought there is a root that can grow out of a dry ground.'¹

¹ T. H. Darlow, *The Love of God*, 70.

Christ's Unattractiveness

Is. liii. 2.—'He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him' (R.V.).

THE attractiveness of Jesus is an almost universally accepted conception. The painter's brush finds no subject more inspiring than some aspect of His grace and beauty. Our poets are quickened to high feeling when they remember His passing. Our great composers are moved to solemn music as His words sink down into their hearts.

But is this wholly true? Is Jesus so universally attractive as these testimonies would seem to prove? Is it not as true to say that to many men Jesus is not attractive at all, and that at times He, and all He stands for, are objects of dislike? The Evangelist who revealed His inner life summed up the sharpest edge of His rejection, 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not.' All the apostles bear witness that He was 'a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.' Jesus Himself, with a shadow on His heart, described Himself as 'the stone which the builders rejected.' And His most pathetic benediction is found in the words, 'Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.' What is the deeper truth in this unattractiveness of Jesus? It is this, that to the natural heart Christ is alien, and always remains so.

Let us mark the features in Jesus which repel the natural man.

1. *The Holiness of His Character.*—Deep down in the unregenerate heart there is an antipathy to holiness. Human nature is not entirely evil, but it is tainted through and through, and, in consequence, as Paul says, 'the carnal heart is enmity against God.'

To ask some men who pass muster with the world's moralists to spend a whole day with a man, whose motives are purely unselfish, whose peace is seen in the quiet contentment of his spirit, whose conduct is touched to fine issues of thoughtfulness and courtesy, whose prayers are felt when they are not heard, is to call them to live in an atmosphere which they find difficult to breathe. They are glad to escape to lower levels of conduct and impulse. In the same way Christ's holiness always troubled

men. As the intense light of His sanctity fell upon Pharisee and Sadducee and discovered the devils lurking in their hearts, as it searched and exposed even the disciples, they shrank from Him.

¶ More than a century and a half ago two notable Christian ministers, William Robertson and John Erskine, were colleagues in Old Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh. On the forenoon of a Sabbath day, Robertson preached, and his subject was the 'Compelling Power of Virtue.' With that strength of reasoning and mastery of method which are displayed in his *History of Charles V.*, he dwelt on the instinct of reverence which all men have for virtue, and declared that were virtue to appear on the earth in a form of exquisite grace it would be hailed with acclamation and exalted to a throne. In the afternoon his colleague, Erskine, whether of set purpose, or through the strange irony of coincidence, stood and declared that virtue had appeared on the earth, and had worn the raiment of a spotless moral beauty. But instead of being received with veneration, and worshipped with adoring praise, He had been hated and scorned, mocked and scourged, and haled to His cross and crucified amid derision.

2. *The Mystery of His Personality.*—This reason for Christ's unattractiveness leads us into a different region of thought. There are minds which are simple and unquestioning. These are easily accessible to spiritual things and are swiftly brought into tune with the infinite. They find the mystery of the personality of Jesus full of helpfulness and delight. But there are other men who are accustomed to the clear white light of material truths. They are eager to reduce all knowledge to terms of mathematical precision. To them Christ's mysteriousness is a stumbling-block. Every great personality, Hegel says, lays upon the world the penalty of explaining him. Our foremost thinkers and teachers, our statesmen and men of action, and all our leaders of commanding genius are problems to their generation. But the task in regard to them all is simply one of exploration, knowledge, and analysis. What Matthew Arnold said of Shakespeare:

Others abide our question; thou art free,
can be said in perfect truth only of Jesus

Christ. Simply because Christ goes beyond the reach and the grasp of the natural man, he is hostile to Him, and resents both His Divinity and His humanity. To-day, even among those who are willing to be His disciples, there is a shrinking from the unsearchable depths in Jesus. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways than our ways, and we tremble and flutter before the mystery of godliness, and with such an experience He is unattractive.

3. *The Authority of His Claim.*—Whether it be a claim which He makes for Himself, or one which He makes upon men for their obedience and their devotion, it rouses instantly a reaction in the natural heart. The unregenerate heart always treasures a pagan ideal. It has a constant hunger for pre-eminence, and exaltation, and it has an eager thirst for, and a delight in, what this life can give. The world's ideal of life was never more finely imagined and more completely attained than in the high days of Greece. Then was conceived a manhood, self-poised, self-sufficient, self-pleasing. It was a manhood developed, disciplined, and enriched until it was able to lay a strong hand on all the realms of power and enjoyment. If any man will question himself as to his day-dreams, he will find that they are precisely those of Joseph in his unschooled youth. He sees his sheaf in the field and all other men's sheaves bowing down to it. But Christ came with a claim for humiliation and submission. He made known the meaning of that claim by the course of His life. He came to be poor, homeless, outcast, to refuse the honours the world would have bestowed upon Him, to drink His Father's cup, to walk in the narrow way all through life, and to pass in through the gate of His cross. That is the claim He makes with an imperative authority. We need not wonder that men resent it and refuse it in the hostility of the natural heart.

¶ No great man has failed more completely to do justice to Jesus Christ than Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism. He passes by the greatest figure in history with contempt. In his Calendar of Humanity he finds a position of honour for hundreds of names representative of humanity, but no place is found for the Name above every name. Why was the philosopher thus blind to the excelling glory? To

Comte man had no spiritual nature; he counted nothing real except the material and the political, and hence the profound spirituality of Jesus Christ had no meaning for him.

4. *The Message of the Cross.*—Here we reach the core and kernel of the antipathy of man. It is natural for him to resent the message of the Cross. It comes with its condemnation of the life he lives, and loves, and excuses. It comes with a requirement of repentance, and that is the most searching and humbling experience the heart can know. It comes with a call to a lowliness and humility, which cuts deeply into the pride and self-sufficiency of the human heart. It comes with the inexorable condition that only as a little child can a man enter the Kingdom of God. It comes with a demand for a confession of wrong-doing, and acceptance of forgiveness, and a surrender of the whole being to Him who has redeemed him. That has always been the foolish thing to the Greek, and the stumbling-block to the Jew. To-day, there are millions upon whom Christ's moral loveliness has begun to dawn. They are willing to let the other features which they resent lie in the shadow, and, as they say, become agnostic to what is too high for them. But they are not willing to accept the gospel of the Cross, and there Jesus is still unattractive.

¶ 'London,' writes Mr Franklin Chambers, 'does not like that unlovely Figure ["Behold the Man"] which Epstein has placed in its midst, neither did Jerusalem like the actual appearance of the Christ after the scourging, the spitting, and the mock crowning. And had we been there we might have felt as many do feel when they look at Epstein's statue, "There is no beauty that we should desire him." The æsthetic appeal has never been the true power that holds the saved. That shockingly distorted "Ecce Homo" may awaken certain temperaments to sincerer attitudes than cynical antagonism or sentimental attraction if they will only make some attempt at interpretation. John Watson's words, written during the Victorian age, are still true—"Jesus' Cross has been taken out of His hands and smothered in flowers; it has become what He would have hated, a source of graceful ideas and agreeable emotions." Some of us may be thankful that Epstein has not affronted us with an attempted

"likeness," but provided instead a sufficient amount of mass and form to suggest the tremendous reality of the despised Christ.'

When and how is this unattractiveness overcome? It is overcome in that day when men's eyes are opened to see Christ in His redeeming grace, and their ears are able to hear His regenerating word. There comes a time when some great need, or some baffling experience, or some disheartening and ashaming fall, or some discovery of a man's own true self, changes the whole angle of vision, and silences all the sounds of the world's music, and then he sees and he hears Christ. Then Jesus becomes, in the language of the Old Testament poet, once heard so frequently on men's lips, 'the altogether lovely.'

There is a day when Jesus takes every man aside. He makes a silence in our lives. Then His voice rebukes and humbles us; but as He speaks with us the light dawns on the soul, and we begin to see what those saw in Him to whom He became both their desire and their delight. Then we enter into the peace of that benediction, given to those who no longer stumble at Jesus.

The Humanity of Christ

Is. liii. 3.—'He was despised and rejected of men' (R.V.).

THERE is more than one reason given in this part of the prophet's poem for the rejection of the Servant of the Lord. It was not only that there was nothing in His surroundings or circumstances to testify to His regal position, but that He Himself was of an aspect so mean and lowly that men shrank from Him and never suspected who or what manner of Being He was. What they said was this: 'He hath no form that we should look upon him, no visage that we should desire him.' Looking at this description broadly, we can see that what it does chiefly is to testify to the full humanity of this Servant of God. He was a true Son of Man, one touched with the feeling of our infirmities, a man of pains and familiar with ailing. And just as the prophet's picture of suffering and ill was to be revolting and incredible to the people of God, so the thought of the full humanity of Jesus Christ has proved a more serious stumbling-block to Christians than the idea of His Divinity itself.

1. As a rule we insist on reading more into the Gospel narratives than they actually contain. The picture they draw of Jesus is simple, natural, and human, in spite of the marvellous character of some of the details. But instead of accepting in good faith the references to His real humanity we seek to evade them and explain them away. We lift Him on to a pedestal of our own manufacture and exaggerate all that is miraculous and Divine in His character, until His humanity becomes altogether unreal.

The process is amply illustrated both in Christian art and Christian theology. The early representations of Christ in Christian art, such as are found in the Catacombs or on tombstones or sarcophagi of the Christian dead, are beautifully naïve and human. True, the representation is often symbolic, and the symbolism is not infrequently Pagan in its origin, but underneath it all there is clearly discernible the grand but simple figure of one who shared the burdens and the needs of our humanity. But as time went on all this was changed, and in the later Byzantine and Italian art the Christ is almost entirely divorced from the suggestions and occupations of human life. He is portrayed sometimes in dread and terrible guise as the judge and ruler of men, and if the picture be drawn from scenes of His earthly life there is the inevitable halo round His brows with all its suggestions of unreality.

Exactly the same process has been followed in theology or Christian thought. The early Fathers frankly accepted the Christ of the Gospels, and assumed that the writers really meant what they said when they spoke of Jesus as growing in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man, as professing ignorance in the questions He asked, and as being really tempted, as really suffering and dying just as men suffer and die. But as time went on, and under the stress of more metaphysical conceptions of God and religious truth, these references to the real human nature of our Lord were regarded as offensive, and as needing to be explained away. The reality of His human life was held to detract somewhat from the splendour of His Divine glory. In the picture drawn by the Evangelists men could see no beauty that they should desire Him. They must be allowed to correct it themselves, and to put their own interpretation on it before

it could be acceptable to their fastidious theological taste. No doubt something of this was due to the difficulty of conceiving two natures in the one person. But this difficulty itself was largely increased by departing from the simple Scriptural standards and by seeking for explanations which in the nature of things were inadmissible.

¶ I feel sure just now that nothing is more wanted than to be powerfully impressed with the truly human character of Christ; it has almost vanished under the extravagant phraseology of hymns and creeds, and yet how much greater is the simple story of His unselfish life than all the superlatives of later Theology.¹

¶ The idea of Christ's growing, as a man, in wisdom as well as in stature, is repugnant to some minds; and, despite the teaching of Scripture, there are those who refuse to think of His being subject to any ordinary human limitations, whether of power or of knowledge. This idea of Christ, too common among believers in His Divinity, finds expression in Shelley's fine but misleading figure—

A mortal shape to him
Was like the vapour dim,
Which the orient planet animates with light.

The same poet makes Him tread the thorns of death and shame, like a triumphal path, of which He never truly felt the sharpness. One of our hymns falls into this heresy when it speaks of the 'seeming infant of a day.' This is exactly to reduce His humanity to a mere appearance. He was not the 'seeming infant,' but the real 'infant of a day.' I have myself met people to whom Christ's patience and suffering, for example, could offer no consolation, because they said, 'He was God all the time, and it was easy for Him.'²

2. It is the humanity of Christ that constitutes the force of His claim upon the hearts of men. Our natural instinct demands a High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. The very reason which sometimes makes Christ despised and rejected of men, gives Him, to all those who have eyes to see, His real power over their lives. In the human life of Jesus, the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, we see embodied the story of the

long love of God to men. No revelation of it as religious truth, or by processes of abstract reasoning, could bring it home to us as it is brought home in the moving record of Christ's earthly life.

It is this that gives Him the sole right to claim the title, Son of Man—that He entered into, shared and realized in Himself our human needs and affections and pains. No doubt to the natural man it would seem as though He ought to have dwelt in the high places of the earth, that He should have come visibly trailing clouds of glory, and attended by legions of angels, that He should have spoken to the wise, the noble, and the good. But it shows Him greater and better than any dreams of ours that He came amid the poor and humble and called to Himself those that labour and are heavy laden. When He took upon Him the form of a servant He did more for men than would have been possible in any other way. He made it easy for them to come to Him in their needs, and to feel that they could talk with Him as a man talks with his friend.

The Incarnation is the first step in the completion of that task towards which all religions had been striving since the beginning of the world: the task of bringing God and man together. It enlarges the whole horizon of the human mind and of human experience. It removes at a single stroke those doubts and fears and midnight terrors which otherwise torment the soul. The acknowledgment of God in Christ is not merely the solution of a metaphysical puzzle, still less is it something dishonourable to God Himself; it is the answer of God's love to the craving of our highest instincts, it is the experience which most helps to fulfil the promise of our manhood made in the image of God.

And it is through this human life of Jesus that we obtain our true conception of His Divinity. It is absurd to reproach us with reading God in the terms of man's experience: how else can we read Him? What do we know of the Divine Being apart from His self-revelation in human life? It is when we realize that Jesus was so truly man that we have to go further and see that He was more. Suppose we translate Him, as some would have us do, into a legendary hero, with a miraculous body, with pretended sufferings, and an unreal death; suppose we twist and turn His speech until we

¹ Max Müller.

² A. Halliday Douglas.

make it mean anything but what the plain sense of it seems to warrant—we may satisfy our curiosity and love of the marvellous, but we have taken away our Lord. The very essence of His Being and work is that He was found in fashion as a man—humbling self even to the very dust. It is because He has stooped so low that He can raise us so high.

The Man of Sorrows

Is. liii. 3.—‘A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.’

THERE is scarcely a verse of Scripture that we feel to be more akin to our thought of the human Jesus than this. It has been set to music which has developed the poignancy and the pathos of it; and the words and the music together have so wrapped themselves in our minds, that the verse has almost become to us a lengthened name for Christ. ‘The Man of sorrows,’ ‘the despised and rejected of men,’ have passed into our common speech as seemly, reverent names for the Son of God.

But think of what that means. When old religions portrayed gods, happiness was the chief note of the portrayal. But when the Son of God does, in actual fact, come upon the earth, He who should be the most radiant of all, is the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief. What drearier light could be thrown upon the condition of the world into which He came? It is true that in the deeps of Jesus’ heart there was a great calm. And that calm, that restfulness, pervaded all His consciousness, when His mind was turned solely to His Father. But when His mind was focused upon the men He loved and would have saved, then, at times, waves akin to desolation came over His Spirit. It is we and our fellows who have turned the serene Son of God into the Man of Grief.

The truth is simply this, that Jesus was the Man of Sorrows because He was the Son of God. His grief was the penalty of His greatness in such a world as this.

1. It was, in the first place, *the penalty of His purity*. Now and then it happens to us to come across one of God’s good men or one of His good women, and we may notice this about

them—that the evil and the base positively hurt them. That emotion relates itself to grief in this way. When such a man sees evil, by itself, as it were, he suffers; when he sees living men and women delighting in it, he sorrows. Jesus and those who follow Him are not mere moral æsthetes. In good men there is always a sense of brotherhood, and a ‘social sorrow’ develops when those who are bound up with them in the bundle of life are delighting in what is hateful to God. The purer the eyes, the sharper the pain; the sharper the pain, the deeper and more honest the grief. When it is such an one as Jesus that is concerned, how shall sinful human hearts, even the most pure of them, understand the sadness that held Him?

¶ The students in Edinburgh used to make Henry Drummond their father confessor. They told him of their failures and sins. But the revelation of human wickedness thus made to him was almost more than he could stand. He was found one Sunday night with haggard and drawn face, leaning on the mantelpiece, unable to take bite or sup. And when invited to eat, broke out into a cry of sheer pain, ‘Oh, the sins of these men, I wonder how God can stand it!’

The holy sensitiveness of Jesus was such that He discerned the hidden sin, the sin that clothed itself in the moods and modes of virtue. He saw sin when it was yet underground. We may be able to see sin when it walks abroad like a leper, and we may recoil from its repulsiveness; but Jesus saw sin when it was working like a mole, underground, in the deep, silent, secret places of the soul. The discernment meant just so much pain; and the discernment was ceaseless, and therefore the pain had no ending.

2. In the second place, His sorrow was *the penalty of His enthusiasm*. Jesus was a man of a great Passion. His whole life was marked by devotedness. He passionately believed in the Kingdom of God; He passionately appealed to men to hear and to enter. Now, a note of enthusiasm is generally urgency. The cause which such an one has at heart dominates his scheme of importance. It holds his mind, masters his desire, controls and directs his energy. He cannot conceive any man giving it a lesser place than he himself does. Even

supposing that he can afford to wait and to plod on for its accomplishment, if another shall treat it lightly, a something akin to desperation seizes him. But the case is worse, when, in any respect, he cannot afford to wait for its accomplishment. Such, in some aspects, was the lot of Jesus. His Kingdom would come indeed, but not for those to whom He spoke unless they listened then. The passing of time meant everything to His hearers. Unless they hearkened and responded, their day would pass. None of us can read the teaching of Jesus and fail to notice the urgency that marked many of His utterances. It is an aspect of His work that we are prone to neglect, but it is not well for us to neglect it.

¶ The historian Trevelyan, in his history of Garibaldi and the making of Italy, tells a memorable story of the Italian statesman Satriano. Year after year Satriano pleaded with the King of Naples for reform and progress in his kingdom. It was in vain. Then, the love and loyalty of his people gone, Garibaldi thundered at the door. The young King sent for Satriano to save his throne, but the old prince knew it was too late. 'Would you have me repeat the miracle of Lazarus?' he enquired in accents of biting scorn. 'I am not Christ, but a miserable mortal.'¹

It is not needful to press the thought that a man's sole chance of rightness with God may pass with a single, light-hearted moment of carelessness and heedlessness; although it is not a thought which we can light-heartedly reject. There are facts queerly stern in life; and we can say that some men seem curiously to have settled into a spiritually petrified state, although they were open enough to spiritual influences once.

But there was sufficient ground for urgency apart from that great, dread possibility. There was the urgency of the loss of the best, and of the absolute finality of the loss of to-day.

There is one great sternness in life which we should all do well to face—that, however many new chances, opportunities, God may give us, *this* chance, *this* opportunity, never comes back; and that the loss of it colours all our future possibilities and chances. The neglects of the past determine, so far, the possibilities of the future. We all, in greater or less degree, here at any rate, because of our

own silly neglect of God's call, have to be content with God's second-best.

Now, Jesus knew that well. Wherefore, He pleaded passionately with men. Clear and strong rang out His 'verily, verily': grave and arresting came His 'he that hath ears to hear let him hear.' And did men hear? One or two, and a woman here and there. But the multitude went heedless on their way, letting each day place a new grave-stone over another might-have-been. And still more earnestly He pleaded, till, at the end, they met Him with jeers.

Let us try to conceive something of what this meant to the heart of Jesus. He spoke of eternal urgencies and men laughed at Him, or treated Him with that practical indifference which gives the sorest wounding to an ardent heart. When there was a dream of a kingdom, they followed Him. The diseased came to Him. But scarce a man hearkened to His spiritual teaching. Still less had they ears for His immediacies. And the heart of Jesus was torn when men, in their heedlessness, blinded themselves to the things that belonged unto their peace.

3. In the third place, His grief was *the penalty of love*. It is an unquestioned fact of life that our noblest is inextricably woven with our pain. We are at our highest when we love. Therefore, when we love we are most susceptible to sorrow. Once names are graven on our hearts, our hearts are open to the pangs and stabs of bitterness, when death or disgrace shall come nigh unto those that are dear.

Conceive the case of a father who watches his child debasing himself, refusing the best, refusing the aid of all the sacrifice—and what stint would there be to it?—that the father would give to save that child's soul alive. The thing happens. No greater grief comes to a good man. It comes solely because he is good and because he loves. After such manner was the experience of Jesus. He really did love men. Indeed He was the only one who ever lived who could be truly said to be possessed with a love of humanity. And the plain fact was that 'He was despised and rejected of men. He was despised and we esteemed him not.' Ah! Jesus could have borne that, if only men had turned to righteousness. He would have been content to go out

¹ Alistair Maclean, *High Country*, 51.

alone, unknown and to be forgotten, if only His word had been heard, and men had lived on it, responding to its call. But His rejection was the rejection of His message: and that cut Him, broke His heart, because He cared enough for men to die for them.

¶ Cobden, struggling for reform in the British Parliament, found it easy to bear contempt for himself but difficult to suffer from the thrusts of those not interested in his cause. John Bright, who discovered the crying wrongs of the Irish, cared nothing for insults to his person, but was all but broken-hearted at a generation blind to the outrages in that unhappy island. Lord Shaftesbury, although he smarted under the onslaughts of his enemies in the House of Commons, cared only for the cause for which he attacked at its roots a whole social order in England based on unholy profits wrung from children of the mill and pit. These men cared nothing for themselves, but they cared tremendously for their cause.¹

His earnest love, His infinite desires,
His living, endless, and devouring fires,
Do rage in thirst, and fervently require
A love 'tis strange it should desire.

We cold and careless are, and scarcely think
Upon the glorious spring whereat we drink,
Did He not love us we could be content:
We wretches are indifferent.

'Tis death, my soul, to be indifferent;
Set forth thyself unto thy whole extent,
And all the glory of His passion prize,
Who for thee lives, who for thee dies.²

Divine Love and Sorrow

Is. liii. 4.—'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.'

Is. lxiii. 9.—'In all their affliction he was afflicted.'

Sorrow belongs to the very nature of love, so long, at least, as the ends which love seeks are not perfectly realized. If love reigned fully in our hearts, so that there was no sin or selfishness anywhere, perhaps there would be no sorrow, but only 'joy in widest commonalty

spread.' But how far away we are from that ideal! Love here, as it works in human life, is blended with sorrow, because its ends are not attained. What are the ends which love seeks? It seeks the highest welfare of others. The loving heart of a mother must feel sorrow if her child is wilful and disobedient, and chooses some path of sin which she knows will ruin his life. The test of the quality of the mother's love is its endurance and the range of its self-sacrifice. Is she prepared to spare no pains to bridge again the gap which separates her from her child? The strongest thing on earth, love is also one of the most tender and delicate—

Love, like an Alpine harebell hung with tears
By some cold morning glacier.

Now if pain of necessity enters into human love, and if human love is a reflection of the love of God, must not God feel pain? Can He be really a Father if His heart is not sympathetically moved by the sorrows and miseries of the lives of His children?

¶ In a letter written by Thomas Erskine, that gentle, pure soul, to a friend who had been with Cobden, and witnessed his grief when his only son died, he says, 'The idea of a sorrowing God shocks the mind of many. It does not shock mine. I cannot conceive of love being without sorrow. I cannot believe that man can give me a sympathy which does not flow into him from God. . . . I need not say to you that this is the view which Christianity gives of God. It sets Jesus before us sympathizing with and participating in every form of human suffering, in order that He might draw men up to love and righteousness.'

1. What grounds have we for saying that God feels sorrow?

There is, in the first place, the fact of sin. Human sin must mean something to God. He cannot be indifferent to it, if His purpose is a redemptive purpose; but must react against it with the whole force of His Being. Is that reaction only one of hatred or repulsion? Has it not a tenderer side? May we not say that God is *wounded* by our sinning, that our sins hurt His heart of love? God, we believe, is ready to forgive the repentant sinner. But real forgiveness costs something. It is no

¹ George Stewart, *The Crucifixion in our Street*, 44.

² Thomas Traherne.

mechanical operation, but is the movement of one personality toward another, a movement in which love covers up an earlier hurt at the cost of self-sacrifice. Sin is something more than the violation of a moral order. It is an offence against a Person; and that Person Jesus Christ has revealed as a Father.

We too often think very lightly of sin, make excuses for it, and treat it as a weakness which may be condoned. The true estimate of sin will be found when we set it in relation to the character of God and His purpose for us. In a child's repentance the bitterest ingredient is the reflection that it has done something which hurts father or mother, and the sweetest that their love is ready to forgive and blot out the past. We are all children of the Father in heaven; and if His heart is one of love it cannot but be that we wound Him when we sin. And is not the strongest motive to repentance just this, that we realize that we are hurting a love which is utterly tender towards us?

But our strongest ground for saying that God suffers with His world lies in the Cross of Jesus Christ. We must not separate the death of Jesus from His life. The death was but the culmination of the life. His whole life was one of self-giving for men; the Cross was the supreme instance of that self-giving. In it the principle of the life came to full maturity. There on Calvary we see to what lengths the love of God was prepared to go in the prosecution of its redemptive purpose.

The wonder of the Cross; how amazing it is! When God seeks to redeem men, when the Father wants to bring home to His children the real nature of His love for them, what does He do? He comes Himself in the Person of His Son to die for them upon a Cross. He enters into the full range of their experience, undergoes the worst which life has to offer—loneliness, desertion by friends, the scorn and hatred of malicious opponents, bodily suffering, mental anguish, a cruel death. Of these far the worst was the mental anguish, the anguish of a sinless soul faced with the real significance of human sin. Here was Divine love, revealing not only its own nature, but the nature of sin. Here was God wrestling with sin, exposing it in its true character, showing what it cost to deal with it effectively. And love's method of dealing with sin is the only method by which it can finally be abolished.

¶ God's purpose is to win men's hearts to Himself. Can He do that? If He can, He is able to establish His kingdom and His power is vindicated. . . . I believe He can, and I draw that faith from the Cross of Christ. Obviously there is only one method of winning such a victory when methods of force are ruled out, and that is simply to love; to love so passionately, so utterly that even the most brutal and seemingly triumphant violence of sin leaves it still love unchanged, except in the increasing agony of its disappointed desire to bless and to redeem. . . . The weakness of a God of love is stronger than men.¹

2. We think, then, of God as working out His purpose at the cost of infinite pain, of His love moving to its final victory through sorrow. For ourselves and our own lives the thought has a two-fold significance.

In the first place it is a thought which should shame us, when we reflect that part of that sorrow is caused by ourselves. Every time we sin we increase the burden which God has to carry. We are familiar with the well-known picture of St Sebastian, his body transfixed with arrows. How often have we sent an arrow into the Divine heart! The Greek word for sin in the New Testament signifies literally 'a missing of the mark.' We miss the mark; the arrow turns aside and wounds God. In *The Sorrows of Satan* Marie Corelli depicts Satan as longing to be good, but hindered by the sinning of man. Satan is kept evil by human wrong-doing. And that same wrong-doing keeps God sad. Can we go on sinning when once we realize what our failure costs God? Is it not the basest ingratitude to turn thus against a love which only seeks to bless us, and is ready to forgive all the past?

¶ An African convert in Bechuanaland, in a testimony meeting, used this striking phrase: 'The cross of Christ condemns me to be a saint.'

But, secondly, the thought that suffering is part of the life of God helps and consoles us when we are called on to suffer. 'Beloved,' says St Peter, 'think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice.' The Christian links his own sufferings with the

¹ H. H. Farmer, *Things not Seen*.

sufferings of Christ. He presses through his pain closer to the heart of God, accepts it as a part of the world's burden which God shares, and with a living faith in the ultimate goodness of God is content to trust when he cannot understand. And his trust takes this form. It leads him to treat his suffering as a Divine discipline. 'God has a blessing for me wrapped up in this trouble. Through it God is calling me to be more tender, more unselfish, more reliant on His grace. I will use it as something which will purify my character and make me more Christlike. Why should I rebel against my pain when I remember all that Christ endured?'

¶ In the Louvre there is a painting of Christ on the Cross by Francia, with a kneeling figure shrouded in darkness at its foot, looking up at the inscription *Et maiora sustinuit Ipse*—And greater pains than thine has He endured.¹

¹ H. S. Coffin.

¶ A writer tells of a woman who lay dying of cancer, and, where others would have found nothing but doom and calamity, she heard the call to courage and self-sacrifice. 'She bore her pain with a radiance and a splendour that transmuted the whole quality of pain, so that it shone with the moral glory of the Cross. "I wish," she said, "that I could gather into my pain all that the world must suffer through cancer and pay the whole debt as I go."'

St Paul has told us how he prayed that God would take away from him his 'thorn in the flesh.' But his prayer was not granted. Instead, there was given him a new revelation of the Divine presence. 'And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness.' He prays no more for the removal of his infirmity, but accepts it with joy as something which brings Christ close to his life.

GOD'S REMEDY FOR SIN

Is. liii. 5, 6.—'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

LET us try to think and to speak as we are able about the great subject of God's remedy for sin, and may His good Spirit so guide our speech and our thinking that we may be led to feel our need and to apply that remedy to the healing of our souls. We need not stop to inquire about the historical situation which gave rise to this wonderful prophecy of the Suffering Servant. Whether it arose out of a contemplation of the sufferings of Jeremiah or of the faithful Israel of God who suffered with and for their sinful people, none can fail to see how perfect a picture it gives of the sufferings of Christ and of His Atonement. The Christian Church from the first without hesitation has taken the words in their full Christian sense, and in that sense we take them now.

I

HUMAN SIN

We have here, in the first place, a confession of human sin. Our race is depicted as a flock

of lost sheep wandering hither and thither in their stupidity and stubbornness. It is a pitiable and a humbling picture, far different from many of the pictures painted by modern writers. In these man is glorified as the crown of creation. Standing on the summit of his achievements he looks back with pride over his long ascent and forward with boundless hope, believing that the race is only at the dawning of its day. In harmony with this mood there is a strong tendency in our time to dismiss sin lightly as by a wave of the hand. It is not a thing to worry about; it is a mere relic of the brute; at the worst it is good in the making, destined inevitably to be eliminated in the further course of the evolutionary process.

That, however, represents but one aspect of the thought of our time. The evolutionary optimism of the nineteenth century, once acclaimed as a modern gospel, has in these days given way to darker moods. Prof. H. R. Mackintosh says with truth that 'never in the

history of the world were great bodies of men so conscious of their corporate moral failure as they now are.' And no wonder, for the state of the world as between nations and races is something to make good men despair. Try as they may, through diplomacy, leagues, and covenants, there seems no healing of wounds, no righting of wrongs, no settled peace to be attained. No one can ponder the present situation without being made to feel that there is something profoundly wrong in human nature. And this impression is only confirmed when we read history. It is true that as 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness' so every age is most acutely conscious of its own troubles, but we deceive ourselves if we suppose that some new and strange thing has happened in our time. The same evils that afflict us have been at work in every age. The world has never been free of wars and oppressions and cruelties which are the fruit of the savage passions and lusts of men. If any part of Nature is entitled to be called 'red in tooth and claw' it is our human race. It is only the soberest truth to say with Burns that man's inhumanity to man has made countless thousands mourn. Is it not manifest that there is something profoundly wrong? At every turn in history the human race has gone astray, missing the right road. It suffers from some deep and universal malady for which human wisdom and effort can find no cure. No wonder sin has been spoken of as engrained and 'original,' for every child born into the world, simply in virtue of its origin, takes the infection and there is no immunity.

We do not understand sin, however, nor do we come at the root of it till we realize that it is not simply a corporate malady of which we are the unfortunate victims, but it is essentially a matter of personal and individual wrongdoing. *All* have gone astray, because *everyone* has turned to his own way. This, above all, is what the men and women of our time, and we ourselves, need to learn. The world is what it is because we are what we are. Generally speaking, the world is full of people just like ourselves, some a little better, some a little worse, and we are all making our contribution daily to the common weal or woe. We must cease to lay all the blame on other shoulders; we must consent to take guilt to ourselves. We must not attribute all the evils

from which we suffer to economic conditions, or the action of governments, or the hostility of nations, or to heredity, or to irresistible fate, or to any other external thing, without first of all acknowledging that the evil from which we chiefly suffer has its root in our own sinful heart. The fact is that in our own little world we all behave very much as the nations and rulers in the big world behave. Are they often proud and unreasonable, so are we. Are they bitter and unforgiving, so are we. Are they all out for their own selfish ends and interests, so are we. In every respect they are men and communities of men 'subject to like passions as we are,' and hence arise the vast troubles which afflict mankind. 'From whence,' says the Apostle, 'come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts,' and until our hearts are cleansed from these lusts, we need not expect that wars and fightings, oppressions and wrongs will ever cease.

Thus from a diagnosis of the world troubles of our time we may get some impression of the viciousness and deadly potency of sin. But, after all, the Cross of Christ is the only adequate measure of it. Sin is fully known and the world is judged at Calvary. If a visitant from another world were to come and ask the question, What kind of a world is this? the most profoundly true and relevant answer would be, 'This is a world that crucified the Son of God when He came into it.' And if the further question were asked, What is sin? again the answer would be that it is that spirit which found the Holy and Loving One insufferable and cast Him out. It is when we ponder these things and let them sink into our minds that we begin to gain some idea of how hopelessly the world and we ourselves in it have gone astray. And when we have come to that point then we are ready to hear with interest and hope how God regards this so desperate a situation, and what He has done to meet it.

II

THE DIVINE SIN-BEARER

'The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.' This is the central affirmation of the gospel. Jesus Christ is more than a Divine teacher and leader of men. He is the Lamb of

God who taketh away the sin of the world.
'He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.'

And on His thorn-crowned head,
And on His sinless soul,
Our sins in all their guilt were laid,
That He might make us whole.

Multitudes in every Christian age have received this as the very charter of their salvation. They have believed that Christ by His death on the Cross has in very deed made atonement for the sin of the world, and applying this, each one to his own case, they have had confidence to say,

In my place condemned He stood ;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.

In this faith they have relief from the burden of their guilt, and have entered into peace with God. They have received the assurance that 'there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,' and that they have passed from death unto life. They feel like Bunyan's pilgrim who when he stood at the Cross and found his burden rolled from off his back, gave three leaps for joy and went on singing. 'Never,' said Dr Chalmers, 'do light and peace so fill my mind as when with the simplicity of a little child I realize the blessed import of those words, "The Lord hath laid on *Him* the iniquity of us all."' It is confessedly a great mystery which completely baffles the human understanding. What it meant to Christ; what it meant, and still means, to God; what change it has wrought in His relation to a sinful world, are questions we can never hope to answer. Attempts to answer them have led to a lamentable conflict of theories of the Atonement. We shall do well to bear in mind the reflection of Lord Balfour, that most acute and critical mind, who, speaking of the atonement, said, 'If it were not too vast for our intellectual comprehension, it would be too narrow for our spiritual need.'

The whole idea of atonement, however, has been assailed on moral grounds. The word 'vicarious' has especially been a ground of offence. Anything that suggests the substitution of the innocent for the guilty has been vehemently rejected as unjust and morally repulsive. There cannot be in the nature of

things, so it is argued, any such transference of guilt and righteousness as is implied in the Atonement. If retribution there be, it must fall on the sinner and on him alone. 'The soul that sinneth, *it* (and not another) must die.' In support of these objections we have pictures drawn, which are really caricatures, of an angry God, bent on vengeance, whose wrath can only with difficulty be appeased, and who will consent to forgive only when the price has been fully paid. If this were anything like a fair representation the whole transaction involved in the Atonement would no doubt be morally repulsive. But we most strenuously protest that this is an utterly perverse and mistaken view. These moral objections have an appearance of force only when they are looked at in the atmosphere of *law*; they completely melt away and vanish when looked at in an atmosphere of *love*.

Rightly understood the Atonement is found to be in deep accord with all that is best and noblest in human life. By Divine decree our whole human race is bound together for good or ill, and the nearer of kin we are to one another the more closely do these ties bind us. The consequence of this is that we cannot help but feel for one another and suffer with and for one another. It would be a dreadful world if it were not so, and human life would be a nightmare. For then we should all be isolated units. There would be no friendship or fellow-feeling, no sympathy or pity. If any man fell he would go down to the bottom like a stone, for no helping hand would be stretched out to stay his fall. Nobody would care. But now, as the world is actually constituted, everyone who falls is bound by loving links, or at the very least by the ties of a common humanity, to those around, and they in varying degrees take the strain and help to bear him up.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear ;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

In many cases it involves bitter pain and suffering, which the innocent feel more acutely than the guilty. But does anyone say it is unjust, or morally repulsive? Do we not rather say,

Blest be the tie that binds ?

For these ties are the very cords of salvation. How many have been kept back from sin because they knew that their guilt and shame would fall heaviest on those dearest to them, and how many after their fall have been brought to repentance by the sufferings of those who loved them and would not let them go. When we see innocent love suffering in the person of wife or mother, father or friend, do we rave against it and find it shocking? Do we not reverence it as something radiant and sublime?

All this has an obvious bearing on the Atonement. When Jesus Christ came into the world He identified Himself with the human race. He undertook all the responsibilities involved in living a human life. All the ties of love and kinship which bind man to his fellowman bound Him, only, we may be sure, with immeasurably greater intensity and force. In some deep sense He must have felt a personal responsibility for the sin of the world. If the prophet Isaiah, in his personal confession of sin, could include the confession, 'I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips,' we may believe that the Son of Man, sinless Himself, really felt coming home upon His own soul the guilt of that sinful humanity of which He was a part. Something like that must be the meaning of St Paul's strange and daring word, 'He was made sin for us.' In His invincible love He held fast to the world even in the moment when it was rejecting and crucifying Him. If the sinful human race were to be doomed, He also as a true and loyal Son of Man would go down to the pit. And His dire cry of dereliction on the Cross would seem to indicate that there was one awful moment when that fate appeared to be impending over Him. In all this mysterious transaction God was at once the Doer and the Sufferer. It happened by Divine decree; it was all involved in the constitution of human nature and in the inevitable working out and fruit of sin. Yet it was not imposed on the Saviour by any hard and external necessity. When we say, 'The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all,' we must not think of some harsh decree, even though we hasten to add that the Saviour took it submissively and lovingly. That is not enough, for the Divine decree, however willingly submitted to, might still be harsh and unjust. Perhaps the best and most Christian way of expressing it is to

remember that God is love, and to say 'Love laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

A further difficulty may briefly be touched on. Some have asked, What need is there for atonement at all? Would not a simple declaration of God's forgiveness be enough? And what more is needed to put things right than the repentance of the sinner? To these and such like questions it may be replied that it is not easy to see how a declaration of unconditional forgiveness could be made without giving an impression of moral indifference on God's side and encouraging sinners to go on in sin. Even Paul's gospel of free grace has been freely criticized as leading in that direction. And further, while the repentance of the sinner is aimed at, the whole problem remains of how to bring the sinner to repentance. It needs a more powerful dynamic than any verbal declaration to expel the evil spirit from his heart.

III

OUR HEALING

That brings us to our last point which is this: 'With His stripes we are healed.' His wounds, far more than Cæsar's, are the 'poor, dumb mouths' which make an appeal more eloquent than any words and are God's dynamic for changing sinful hearts. It is a simple historic fact that the sufferings of Christ have brought healing to human souls in all ages from the hour when the dying thief turned to Him upon the Cross down to the present day. The appeal has been beyond all comparison effective; it is universal in its range, and multitudes have found it irresistible. It is passing strange, and a wonderful confirmation of the truth of the gospel, that you can go to the uttermost ends of the earth and to the most degraded races of men, and find that they respond to the story of the Cross as to nothing else. From the naturalistic point of view it is simply the story of the sufferings and death of a heroic Jew in a distant age and a distant land. Yet in some most strange way it comes home as something personal and has supreme power to touch and move the heart.

Whence comes this power, and what is the healing virtue of the Saviour's wounds? The answer is twofold. On the one hand they reveal, as nothing else does, the shameful

of sin. Here every veil of decency that masks the true nature of sin is torn off, and sin is exposed in its naked hideousness. The sinner is brought to confess, with a new and open-eyed horror, 'When I sin I take sides with *that*.' On the other hand these wounds reveal, as nothing else does, the suffering love of God. Many in our time would fain lay on God the whole blame of the world's sin. He made us and the world, they would say, and He must be held responsible for the result. Well, what is the Divine answer to that charge? It is given in the Cross. There we see the Son of God, in silent uncomplaining love, taking upon Himself the whole burden and the guilt. If just judgment must fall on human sin He is willing that it should wholly fall on Him.

Surely this is fitted to stop every mouth and to break every hard heart. If there be a dispute between two, and one is ready to say, 'I take the whole blame,' what is left for the other to say and do? Especially if he who is least to blame takes all the blame, it would need a very stubborn heart to resist such an appeal without at least offering to share the blame. Even so, when the sinner is brought face to face with the Cross of Christ and is made to understand what it means, something in his heart gives way and his opposition to God breaks down. He is ready to confess,

Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness;
Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing
blood.

New feelings awake within him, feelings of contrition, of gratitude, of responsive love, and a desire to serve. All his inner life is broken up and begins to rearrange itself round a new and higher centre. He turns with aversion from sin and self, and begins a new life in Christ. So profound is the inward change that he is fitly called a new creature in Christ Jesus. He would express the mighty change, as multitudes have done, in the immortal words of Isaac Watts,

When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Thus it comes to pass that 'with His stripes we are healed,' or at least the opportunity is

ours if we will but open our hearts to His healing influence. For still He comes to sinful people like ourselves 'with healing in His wings.' Surely we cannot close our hearts against such love. Lost sheep that we are, shall we not return to the Shepherd of our souls? Shall we not give thanks that 'the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all?' And shall we not say to Him with sincere desire, 'In Thy mercy heal us all'?

J. H. MORRISON

The Silent Sufferer

Is. liii. 7.—'He was oppressed, yet he humbled himself and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth' (R.V.).

THE Incarnation is here set before us in some of its deeper aspects and in its more intimate bearing on human life and needs. In the picture of this meek and patient sufferer we can read again the story of how God has made Himself known to those that have ears to hear.

1. 'He was oppressed yet he humbled himself, and opened not his mouth.' 'He humbled himself.' No more real or beautiful expression of the Incarnation can be found than that contained in words like these. And Jesus set His own seal upon them when He said, 'I am among you as a serving man.' In all the precepts that He left us, there are none more difficult or more apparently impossible to follow than those which bid us be silent under suffering and wrong and turn our cheek to the smiter; and if we would measure the moral interval between Him and ourselves we have only to mark how He practised what He preached.

'Now,' says Sir George Adam Smith, 'silence under suffering is a strange thing in the Old Testament—a thing absolutely new. No other Old Testament personage could stay dumb under pain, but immediately broke into one of two voices—voice of guilt or voice of doubt. In the Old Testament the sufferer is always either confessing his guilt to God or, when he feels no guilt, challenging God in argument. David, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Job, all strive and are loud under pain. Why was this Servant the unique and solitary instance of silence

under suffering? Because He had a secret which they had not.'

To Jesus the suffering He was called on to endure was not aimless, and gave Him no reason to doubt the goodness and mercy of His Father. He saw, as we often do not and cannot, behind the veil. He realized that there was a purpose in it all, and the joy that was set before Him became as a blessed anodyne that helped Him to endure the shame. His lowly service and suffering were such integral parts of the work He had come into the world to do that He took them quietly and almost as a matter of course. And His example teaches us at least this, that we may look for the silver lining to the clouds above our heads. In much of what we are called to endure there is a gracious and fruitful discipline, and happy are they who can see it and whose faith can help them to be still and open not their mouths.

I know, O Jesus, in the bitter hour

Of human pain, that Thou hast felt the power
Of deeper anguish, and my lips are still,

Because in silence Thou hast borne God's will.

Nor could Jesus ever count His suffering as the punishment for His sin. The most startling thing about His life is the absence from it of repentance and regret. He was never haunted by the memory of a past that He would fain undo, and never needed to bow beneath the strokes which His own folly had earned. He came to serve men, and He served them to the uttermost, cost what it might.

But there is another and still more beautiful trait in His silence. It shows the completeness and purity of His love for men. We are inclined to wish sometimes that He had drawn attention to the greatness of the sacrifice He made, that we might understand it better. But would not this have been just to spoil His gift? The gifts of true love are always unostentatious, and it is the patient endurance of Jesus that helps us to understand the freedom of Divine grace. If we are inclined to question the cost to Himself of the Redemption Christ wrought because He did not proclaim it upon the housetops, let us remember how carefully we conceal from those we love what it costs us to make them happy, and how we count our own inconvenience as nothing, if it can help or profit them. And so it is not altogether fanciful for us to see in

the silence of Him who, as a sheep before her shearers, was dumb, the fullness and freedom of His love.

¶ Owing to his father's failure in business, the young Macaulay, whose prospects at Cambridge had seemed so brilliant, found that his brothers and sisters would have to depend mainly upon himself for support. 'He acknowledged the claim cheerfully, lovingly, and, indeed, almost unconsciously. It was not in his disposition to murmur over what was inevitable, or to plume himself upon doing what was right. He quietly took up the burden which his father was unable to bear; and, before many years had elapsed, the fortunes of all for whose welfare he considered himself responsible were abundantly assured. In the course of the efforts which he expended on the accomplishment of this result he unlearned the very notion of framing his method of life with a view to his own pleasure; and such was his high and simple nature, that it may well be doubted whether it ever crossed his mind that to live wholly for others was a sacrifice at all.'¹

2. 'As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb.' The simile employed here serves to strengthen the idea in the former verse—that the Servant of God suffered in silence and without protest. But there is another shade of meaning in it as well, namely, that His suffering is voluntary, and even self-imposed.

The reference here is probably to a sacrificial lamb; and it was a familiar superstition in regard to animal sacrifices that the victim must go to the altar willingly and even gladly, if the sacrifice were to be complete. To carry out this latter idea the victim was often decked with flowers, and if it resisted and struggled, this was looked upon as an evil omen, and men would be sceptical as to any good which might come from a sacrifice so marred. And it is not without purpose and reason that the Scriptures suggest again and again that all the service and sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary. If we can at all enter into His consciousness or understand the meaning of some of the deepest things the Apostles witness of Him, we shall believe that He gave Himself freely for the need and sin of men. And, remembering who

¹ G. O. Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, ch. iii.

He was who so gave Himself, we find that the idea of His willingness becomes full of meaning. It takes away all that sting of injustice in His sacrifice which is so real a difficulty to many minds.

It is not martyrdom to toss
In anguish on the deadly cross :
But to have will'd to perish so,
To will it through each bodily throe,
To will it with still-tortured mind,
This, only this, redeems mankind.¹

If there were times in His history when He seemed to be under constraint, and set His face to go forward as to some desperate enterprise, the constraint was that of His own resolute will. It was by no forced labour that He spent Himself almost to exhaustion in relieving the wants of the sick and sorry multitudes around Him. And when He came to tread the Via Dolorosa of the Cross He went forth willingly, feeling that He had a de cease to accomplish at Jerusalem ere His work could be done. And in all this surely we can see that God's love so manifested had a deep, eternal purpose behind it. Given the freedom and sin of man, then Redemption is rooted in the very nature of God. His love had its special time of manifestation when the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us, but it did not then begin to be. He loved us before the foundation of the world, and therefore nothing can separate us from His love. The willing sacrifice of Christ gives us the right to trust God to the uttermost, and shows us that He deals with us not on the basis of mere caprice, but on principles that are eternal. It teaches us that we cannot measure the Divine love by any standards of time—it is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

¶ Calvary becomes, for those who look trustingly at the Crucified, a window through which we see into the life of the Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus' sin-bearing is for us a revelation of the eternal sin-bearing of the God and Father of us all. Behind the cross of wood outside the gate of Jerusalem we catch sight of a vast, age-enduring cross in the heart of the Eternal, forced on Him generation after generation by His children's unlikeness to their Father—forced, but borne by Him, in conscientious devotion to them, as willingly as

¹ Ibsen.

Jesus went to Golgotha. If at Calvary we find the rocky coast-line of human thought and feeling opposing the inflow of God, the incoming waters break into the silver spray of speech, and their one word is Love.¹

3. The old mystics used to say that it is impossible for love not to be returned in some measure. Whether we believe that or not, we shall agree, if our moral sense is not quite dead, that such love as Christ's ought to be returned. We shall not, therefore, be unwilling to find the spring and motive of Christian life in a passion of love and gratitude for Him who freely gave Himself for us all. Were Jesus Christ a mere passive victim of the wrath of God, this would hardly be possible. But, granted the freedom and spontaneity of His sacrificing love, it is only natural that it should bring forth a like devotion in return. As we meditate afresh on all the suffering, service, and sacrifice of the Son of Man, our lips seem unconsciously to frame the words of ancient song, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.' Our joy is touched with the pain of remorse, and that in itself serves to quicken our affection and rouses within us the blundering desire for better things. It is for most of us the tragedy of the Christian life that we can do so little for Him who has done such great things for us. Our full intention is to confess the Christ always and everywhere. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak. There are times when we can fully enter into the poet's remorseful words :

I seem to hear your laugh, your talk, your song,
It is not true that Love will do no wrong,

Poor child.

And did you think, when you so cried and smiled,
How I, in lonely nights, should lie awake,
And of these words your full avengers make?

Poor child, poor child.

And now unless it be

That sweet amends thrice told are come to thee,
Oh God, have Thou no mercy upon me,

Poor child.

That is the cry of an affection that has shown itself a poor return for lavished love, and it might be the confession of all Christians to Jesus Christ. If our Christianity means any-

¹ H. S. Coffin, *Some Christian Convictions*, 155.

thing, it means for us an acknowledgment of a debt to Christ which we can never pay—it means an unceasing and earnest desire to take up our cross after Him, to lay ourselves on the altar of sacrifice and make some poor amends for the love of Him who for our sakes was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb opened not His mouth.

O Love, who once in time wast slain,
Pierced through and through with bitter woe ;
O Love, who wrestling thus didst gain
That we eternal joy might know ;
O Love, I give myself to Thee,
Thine ever, only Thine to be.¹

The Exalted Christ

Is. liii. 11.—'He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.'

1. HERE we take our stand beside the prophet, not as he witnesses the last tragedy of the Servant's anguish, but as he beholds Him crowned in the beauty of a great achievement, exalted above the kings of the earth, throned upon the praises of His people, satisfied with the travail of His soul, seeing for a seed the many sons whom He has brought to glory, reigning as King of the spiritual city, dividing the spoil with the strong. Such a vision as this becomes possible only to the spirit which has recognized that the real burden upon human life, the true riddle of the painful earth, is not physical suffering or social distress, or intellectual darkness, but the clouds which veil the face of God. When men can rejoice in the light of His countenance, the sun has risen upon them which banishes the night. The prophet lets us see this Servant of the Lord robed, as it might be, like the figure in the picture of the 'Light of the World,' a royal and victorious presence though the thorn still circles His brow.

Then and only then can we look back at the last act in the sufferings of the Servant with some hope of being able to discern, in what otherwise were a bitter and sordid tragedy, the triumphant Will of God. We behold Him, among the flotsam and jetsam of humanity, a convict without part or name among His

fellows, a prisoner hurried from the cell to the place of execution, a felon, cut off out of the land of the living. Yes, but the exaltation which in the larger purpose awaits this righteous Sufferer at the very moment when He is thus excommunicate from life alters all the values of the picture. It is not the hand of a cruel fate, but the will of a loving God, that brings Him to the last extremity, when He pours out His soul unto death. Here is an event which gives a new interpretation to suffering. We, too, are called to suffer often in ways that seem harsh and needless. And nothing can so shed light upon our darkness as to be able to say that it is God's will and to subordinate our discipline to the larger knowledge and deeper moral purpose of God. Our own moral experience may thus become a key to the words 'It pleased the Lord to bruise him.'

¶ Sometimes all that we can do is to stand still and bear, and go on bearing as best we can, sure that it all comes from God's hand and so must be good for us—good for the whole of His creatures, somehow, that we should bear it all for the sake of the Lord, who bore the Cross and shame, and the weight of our sins.¹

2. 'He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.' It is a notable and healthy sign of our times that men are everywhere turning away from doctrines, creeds, and confessions to Jesus Christ Himself, though it is unfortunate that in popular speech this is generally expressed as though it were a retrograde movement—back to Jesus Christ. It is probably to correct this that the phrase 'the living Christ' has been coined, as though to show that the eyes of the world are turned, not to the historical Jesus who remains a blessed memory and example for men, but to the exalted Christ who sees of the travail of His soul in the present salvation which through Him comes to the children of men. It needs to be insisted on that this is a step forward and upward rather than backward. In these days we can have no true vision of Jesus Christ except as we regard Him in the light of all that He has accomplished in history and of all that He is doing in society around us. Just as the prophet recognized the grandeur and power of the Servant of the Lord through His

¹ Scheffler.

¹ *Life of W. E. Collins, Bishop of Gibraltar*, 51.

forecast of the work He would do, so we must understand how Jesus sees of the travail of His soul before we can grasp the full significance of His mission in the world. He is to us not simply a name, a memory, a religious formula; He stands for the most attractive personal influence and the source of the purest inspiration that the world has ever known. His position to-day is not that of an anxious claimant for the suffrages of men, but that of a King reigning in glory and strength. How often we forget that He sees of the travail of His soul, that the Kingdom of God is in the midst of us, and that in that Kingdom Christ is King! If we ask still, as men always do, for a sign, we can see it most clearly in the evident fact of the superiority of those moral and spiritual forces for which the name of Jesus Christ stands over principalities and powers, over those mental and physical forces in which the greatness of this world consists.

The record of the word and work of Jesus among men, in spite of much evil and the many blemishes that have clung to it from the human side, remains an abiding testimony to His sovereign power. And if the past is great the future is greater still. The place which Christ holds in it and is to hold is the ground of our fairest hope. He shall see of the travail of His soul. All that He has done in His own person for the sorrows, needs, and sins of men will not and cannot go for naught. All that is being done in His name—the ceaseless prayers put up to heaven, the sweet savour of many a self-sacrificing life, the energy and passion of the great mass of faithful souls—all this tells indubitably, and will tell still more in larger results and grander enterprises in time to come. Truly He has seen His seed; through the freedom won by His suffering, and the forgiveness He has brought, men and women the world over have risen into newness of life, and stand the monuments of His mercy. Ask them what Christ means to them, and if His living presence in their lives is a reality or a dream, and they will tell you with bated breath and faltering lips of the wonders of His redeeming grace. He is to them the source of a new righteousness that has shed a strange glory over their lives. They may not be able to declare the why and wherefore of it all, but one thing they know, that whereas they were blind now they see.

¶ Hugh Redwood says, in the closing words of his book *God in the Slums*: 'Christ is not struggling for victory. The victory was won 1900 years ago. That is what the ordinary man needs to be assured of—the daily victories of the Living God.' The ordinary man may well be assured. He is being assured. Two ordinary Scots people, living in London, happened to be visiting St Andrews when a House Party of the Oxford Group was in progress. By 'the merest chance' they came to the Sunday morning service in the old University Chapel. It was a witness service, full of living and miraculous power. After service, they were waiting outside to speak to me. The wife said, 'What is this wonderful thing? Can we come into touch with it? We just happened to follow the crowd.' The husband said, 'When I heard you talking about reality and hilarity as the distinguishing marks of the Christian life, and how the Greek word *hilaron* had been pressed early into the service of the Church, I thought how glad these people must have been to know that Jesus was alive. You know, my dear' (turning to his wife), 'we were just beginning to doubt it.' But, like the two disciples on the Emmaus road, these two modern doubters came into an experience of the Living Christ and into a fellowship that met their need.¹

¶ Lax was one day taking tea with one of the families of the Poplar Mission. Father, mother, two children, and Lax formed the little party. Presently, another friend joined them. He was an amateur conjurer.

'Would you like to see me make a ha'penny into a sovereign?' said he to the children.

'Yes,' was the reply. To that interesting proposition the whole party was agreeable.

The conjurer took a halfpenny, placed it in the palm of his hand, closed his fingers over it. Genuflexions and mysterious mutterings. Then he cried, 'Hey, presto, pass!' He opened his hand, and lo, there was a sovereign.

'Do it again!' said the children, filled with wonder.

Again the conjurer set to work, and again, when he opened his hand, there was, not a halfpenny, but a sovereign!

'Wonderful! Wonderful!' cried the party. It was wonderful.

'Why,' cried Lax, 'I've seen that done again and again in the realm of grace.'

¹ E. Macmillan, *Finding and Following*, 265.

Christ was no conjurer. He was no deceiver. But for a quarter of a century in Poplar He has been taking poor, valueless copper and turning it into gold. He has taken halfpenny men into His blessed hand, and, before He has let them go, has transformed them into sovereign characters with the King's image on them! ¹

From every land beneath the sun,
 They come!
 To tell of mighty victories won;
 Unto the Father through the Son,
 They come!
 They come—the victors in the fight,
 They come—the blind restored to sight,
 From deepest Darkness into Light:
 They come!
 In a holy exaltation,
 With a sound of jubilation,
 They come! They come! ²

3. 'Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.' This sets Him at once among the conquerors, the great powers of history. We have still a serene confidence in mighty armaments and full treasuries, but what pigmy weapons these are beside those of Jesus Christ! Men come and go, nations rise and fall, but His word abides. He rules the world from the Cross, which is His throne, and by reason of the prayers, self-sacrifice, and saintly living of His followers, He divides the spoils of history with the strong. And so we look to Him to-day, not as one long dead and buried, but as one whose power is manifested all around us and whom we see living again in lives made better by His presence, and ruling the hearts and consciences of men with His law of love. Not only in the prophet's vision, but in the actual experience of great multitudes, He is 'the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely.'

A man of sorrows He, and guest of grief,
 Who walked in quiet on life's humble ways
 And suffered all the slurs and dull dismays
 Which crush on mighty souls. His days were brief—

¹ *Lax of Poplar*, 254.

² Johnⁿ Oxenham.

A sudden splendour cleft with storm. Belief
 On Him grew dim, though great hearts
 walked through haze
 Of doubt and fogs of death with shouts of
 praise,
 And knew Him glorious and acclaimed Him
 Chief.
 And now He stands strange, unaccompanied, vast,
 Tall as all solemn, purpling mountains are—
 Stands, while majestic, crumbling centuries
 waste.
 The moaning travail of His soul is past.
 He hath throned Love and wrought redemption
 far;
 And who believeth on Him shall not haste. ¹

Long Ropes and Strong Stakes

Is. liv. 2.—'Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.'

'HENRY WARD BEECHER,' says Dr Fosdick, 'would often work out an idea through a long course of abstract argument until suddenly his thought took fire and blazed out in a simile or metaphor. Then the wise preacher would draw his pencil through the laborious disquisition and all that the people ever got was a flaming picture.' One suspects that the prophet had gone through some such procedure when, having long brooded over the estate of his people, he flashed out his vision of their need: 'Lengthen your ropes and strengthen your stakes.' Any camper acquainted with tents recognizes the figure. When you pitch a tent, if you do lengthen the ropes you must strengthen the stakes. Increased extension calls for increased stability.

The text is a call to wider vision, more amplitude of view, more roomy conceptions of God and of life. We are so apt to get contracted, narrow and self-centred. It is also a call to more depth. The deeper our spiritual life is the more it will stand the strain of being distributed over a wide area. These are the two great necessities the text speaks of—spiritual width and spiritual depth.

1. Let us take it first of *personal life and witness*. No man can have real spiritual influence beyond his experience. He may

¹ W. A. Quayle.

have commanding gifts of speech and personal magnetism, and through these may influence people to his way of thinking, but, unless he can help them to live their own lives apart from his dominating influence over them, he may be more of a hindrance than a help. There must be independent spiritual life. Unless each life is thoroughly rooted and grounded in Christ and not in dependence on someone else or trusting to someone else's experience of Christ, it will never stand the strain.

The stake of one's spiritual experience must be well driven in and in a sure place. But some are so anxious for temporary security that they are willing to avail themselves of the first ground that offers. It may be the ground of an emotional experience, which, as often as not, is loose, sandy soil. They drive in a stake, but that sort of thing is much too easy. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' If on any other ground one pitches his tent, any other ground than that of a deep surrender to the will of Christ, he is liable to have everything swept away in a blizzard of trial or a blast of sudden temptation or calamity, and to have to say in the words of Jeremiah: 'My tent is destroyed and all my tent-pegs are plucked up; my children have gone away from me and are not, and there is none to spread out my tent any more, or to set up my tent curtains.'

Tremendous things are at stake on our stability. People are looking to us for challenge and help, and we must give it to them in no uncertain way, or else we lower for them the whole standard of moral worth. At any moment we must be prepared to take the strain of holding people up to the highest, not of patting them on the back and saying that we are quite sure they are much better than they think themselves to be. We are not here to hold them to the highest of what they think of themselves, but of what God would have them be; and to do this we ourselves must be living at the highest, at our own moral and spiritual best. If our stakes are not well and truly driven in, they will never stand the strain of that; we cannot do it in such a way as will convince others.

What is true of our personal life is true also of our personal witness. It will be according to what we are, actually at the moment of our witness, not what we were at the time of our

conversion. And it is not only that our witness must be to Christ's present and immediate power in our lives, but that we must always be going beyond our personal witness in actual personal surrender. In other words, *we must throw in a stake every time we give a challenge.* For it is not simply that we are often tempted to over-extend our influence beyond our actual spiritual experience, but to overreach and outrun the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We dare not go in advance of His guidance, not even in speaking to an individual about his soul.

¶ In the *Life of Oswald Chambers*, a life of rare spiritual sweetness and power, we are told how once he was with his friend, old John Cameron of Auchindoul, a Highland sheep-farmer, who lived with God at the foot of Ben Nevis. They were out shooting on the moor with two dogs, and, when they came to a heather knoll, the old man said, 'This will be a fine place to pray.' After prayer, Cameron said to the young man, 'If you get permission to speak to my ploughman about his soul, do so.' Oswald Chambers naturally expressed surprise that he had not spoken to him himself, for he would speak about Jesus to all sorts of men. 'My laddie,' he said, 'if you don't know what the permission of the Holy Ghost is in talking to a soul about salvation, you know nothing about the Holy Ghost.'

2. What has been said of our personal life and witness is true also of *the witness of the Church*. 'Lengthen your cords' is the Divine appeal to the Church. We must always be enlarging the place of our tent. We must always be making more room for God in our methods of work and worship. We organize and arrange everything beforehand, leaving little or nothing to the spontaneous action of God's Spirit. 'We leave nothing to chance,' as we say; which may be another way of saying we leave nothing to God.

Or, it may be that we crowd out God by our narrow and traditional conception of the Church. The danger is to narrow its boundaries, to be content with its past achievements, and not to look for any great things to happen, for any great accessions to its ranks from the masses which are at present outside and untouched by its appeal. The Church will never come into its own, will never 'thrill with

the joy of girded men' girded for the fray, with feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace, until it lengthens its cords and enlarges the place of its tent and finds room for those who never belonged to it, who would have nothing to do with it, but who are now being redeemed from paganism and sin. That is the Church which will be Christ's instrument for bringing the world to His feet and realizing the vision of the prophet: 'Lift up thine eyes round about and see: all they gather themselves together; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.'

What other vision can we have for the Church at this time of national and international spiritual emergency? Multitudes have ceased to believe in the Church as a spiritual force equal to the present emergency; but they have not ceased to believe in Christ. It is in Christ, rather than in the Church, that we must put all our faith, stake all our hope. It is in the name and power of Christ that we must go all out to win back them that are without. When we have experienced His saving power in our lives we can say: 'This is our God, we have waited for Him. He will come and save us.'

¶ Dr T. R. Glover, in his *Jesus of History*, says that wherever the Christian Church, or a section of it, or a single Christian, has put upon Jesus Christ a higher emphasis, above all, where everything has been centred in Him, there has been an increase of power for Church, community, or individual. 'Where new value has been found in Jesus Christ, the Church has risen in power, energy, appeal and victory.'

In our Church Extension work, are we just following the traditional or artificial demands of a policy, or are we being led by the Holy Spirit? Is it with us merely a question of extending our own particular Church, lengthening the cords; or is it a question of how best to make Christ available to our scattered and isolated people? The two things are not necessarily synonymous; at least, they have not proved to be so in the past. Our need is to have such a rich, overflowing experience of Jesus Christ, such a fellowship of spiritual life as will transcend all denominational boundaries. Dr Fosdick was once crossing the American continent by train. It was late summer, and he passed through hundreds of miles of wheat

lands. He saw the quarter-sections with their fences, and the corn nearly as high. When he returned some time later the corn had overtopped the fences. He saw an unbroken sea of ripened grain, waiting for the harvest. He knew that the fences were still there, the old dividing marks; but they were no longer visible. Are we ready for such an over-flowing flood of spiritual life as will transcend our differences?

The same applies to our Native Mission work. Are we in a position to lengthen our cords? You cannot have successful missionary enterprise side by side with a spiritually shrinking, reluctant or irresponsible European Church. We must strengthen our stakes, deepen our religion, if we would lengthen our cords; that is, extend it to the heathen peoples, either white or black. The strengthening must always precede the lengthening; for, to have lengthening without strengthening is to court failure and disaster. The only way in which we can extend the gospel to those of our own people who are outside the Church, and to the heathen people, is to tighten our own grip on Jesus Christ. If those who preach the gospel to the white or black heathen have no deep spiritual fellowship among themselves, a fellowship that is challenging, demanding, sustaining, how can they expect their white or native converts to be kept from falling into their old ways of heathendom or sin? Have we such a fellowship among ourselves, in our homes, in our churches, in our Assemblies; a fellowship of which Jesus Christ is the life and soul and which has the Cross at its heart; a sharing fellowship that is radiant and redemptive in the quality of its costly and challenging life, in the power of which we can go out with all humility and confidence to claim men and women for His wonderful and happy service?

The Gift of Forgetfulness

Is. liv. 4.—'Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth.'

A FAVOURITE figure of speech used by the prophets to describe the bond between God and Israel was the figure of marriage. God was the husband of Israel, Israel was the bride of God; the nation's sin was unfaithfulness, punished by separation with its shame and sorrow. And

this is the figure which is used here to tell the good tidings. Israel, says the prophet, will be taken back by her offended husband and will become again His bride; the stain of the divorce will be wiped out, and the sin will be forgiven. 'In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.'

1. There is nothing petty in this love, nothing to mar the perfect joy of the reconciliation. When God gives He gives without reserve; when God forgives He forgives utterly. His forgiveness is so complete that it is forgetfulness, remembering their sins no more. And further, the prophet promises such a complete reconciliation that even they, he says, will forget the evil past. The unfaithful bride that had been left in worse than widowhood will be received back with such a perfect love that the painful memory will be past. What a wonderful figure of Divine love this is! 'Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name.' Is that not too much for even God to promise? He might out of His abundant mercy promise to forgive so freely and fully that the thought of their sin may be said to be cast away from Him, but how can He give to them self-forgetfulness, and save them from self-reproach and kill the memory of their shame? If remorse is bound up in remembrance, if recollection means sorrow, how can God save them from that?

When vain desire at last, and vain regret
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain,
And teach the forgetful to forget?

The explanation which the prophet gives makes the promise even more beautiful. Painful memory can be obliterated only by the full flood of joy. When happiness is complete there is no room for sad recollection; where there is no cause for remembrance there is no opportunity for remorse. And the joy which the prophet thus announces has its source in the full consciousness of God's love. The recovered happiness is the fruit of the recovered love.

2. To many religious people the burden of the past is the heaviest burden of their lives. No difficulties and trials of the present can match it for bitterness. They can see through faith some of the purpose of their heavenly Father in their present trials; they see something at least of the meaning of discipline; they know that His grace is sufficient for them; and their faith is potent enough not only to lighten the burdens of the present, but to lighten the burden of the future. They look forward calmly and hopefully to whatever the years may bring. And yet they are often weighed down by the burden of the past. Sometimes it is the very greatness and success and joy of the past that induce this constant recollection. To men of a certain temperament there is a temptation to live too much in the past, and so to weaken life for the duties of to-day. In reviewing times that are gone memory has a hallowing, softening power, setting things in a soft and tender light for us. Thus it is an infirmity of old age, though it is not confined to old age, to glorify the past and to think that the former times were better than these. It is often a harmless sentiment, but it carries with it a very real temptation which sometimes robs life of its full power.

3. The burden of the past, however, which is more in keeping with the thought of the text is not the recollection of some joy or success of the past, but of some failure, some sorrow, some sin, some shame. And to those who live under the shadow of this memory it would mean new life if the promise came to them with the meaning it had in the prophet's lips, 'Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth.' Of course, there is a certain sense in which we cannot forget, and are not meant to forget. Experience has its lessons to teach, and everything that happens to us leaves its mark, which it is folly for us to cover up till at least we understand the markings. There is a shallowness of mind, a childish thoughtlessness, which makes no account of what happens, and which finds it easy to forget, for there is not depth enough in the mind for events to leave any mark at all. To such the word is not Forget, but Remember. All religion begins with repentance, and the appeal to repentance is an appeal to memory. 'Remember' is the ethical method of all ages; probing men to the roots

of life, laying bare the sins and faults of youth, revealing the secret things to a man's own astonished soul, tearing his very heart with the despair of memory. Not by any easy, facile optimism can true peace and true forgetfulness be achieved. This burden of the past, which is the burden of moral existence, cannot be relieved by merely turning the back on what is uncomfortable to think about, and concerning one's self with the details of present life.

But the promise of the text is to those whose captivity has been turned, who are home from the exile of the far country, at least to those who believe in the forgiveness of sin, who accept the love of the Father, and who, therefore, know that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. And yet some of these are still oppressed by some shadow of the past; they are still weakened by the old sorrow or haunted by the old shame, and have never realized that the love of God carries with it this promise, 'Thou shalt forget.' It is quite true that the past cannot be altogether undone, cannot be just as though it had never been. Many men who have emerged out of the struggle into peace, and who are not tormented any more by despairing remorse, have still, and will ever have as long as they live, the sad feeling that they are not what they might have been, that they are not the fine, true instrument for God's purpose which they would have been but for the evil of the past. The sting has not quite been taken out of the past so long as they feel they must

Stand as mute

As one with full, strong music in his heart,
Whose fingers stray upon a shattered lute.

4. What we find in the text is a tacit condemnation of the sentimental brooding on the past, whatever that past may be, which weakens the present life, which keeps a man from doing his duty calmly, and giving himself to whatsoever things are true and pure and lovely and of good report. In the Christian life St Paul tells us that progress towards perfection is attained just by forgetfulness of the past: Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forward to the things which are before, I press towards the goal, to the mark of the prize. It does not mean, as we have

seen, that we should forget everything, even if we could. We are expected to remember the lessons of the past, lessons of both failure and success, of sorrow and joy, of moral defeat and moral victory. The principle is a simple one. All that would hinder us from running the Christian race, all that would impede, must be put behind us, as we bend to our present tasks and face our future.

My soul is sailing through the sea,
But the Past is heavy and hindereth me.
The Past hath crusted cumbrous shells
That hold the flesh of cold sea-mells
About my soul.

The huge waves wash, the high waves roll,
Each barnacle clingeth and worketh dole
And hindereth me from sailing!

Old Past let go, and drop it' the sea
Till fathomless waters cover thee!
For I am living but thou art dead;
Thou drawest back, I strive ahead
The Day to find.

Thy shells unbind! Night comes behind,
I needs must hurry with the wind
And trim me best for sailing.¹

Indulgence in the retrospective, self-complaining, self-accusing temper, which is so common, must be seen by us to be a temptation. If we believe in the eternal love of God we must not let any pale ghost of the past chill our blood and keep us from our pilgrimage. If even our sorrow weakens us, if it is not making us truer and stronger, we must forget it. If our sin, the shame of our youth, the reproach of our past—if even our sin weakens us, if it is not bracing us to redeem the time, we must forget it. This is the gospel, the goodness of the love of God, the gospel of forgiveness full and free and without reserve. Christ frees us from the past, from the thralldom of the things that are behind.

¶ A man who had lived for many years the Christian life, told me how there was a place in a street in Edinburgh which was associated with a sin. Every time in his early life he passed it, it brought back again the keen remorse and shame. It seemed to stain his life afresh whenever he saw the very place. But when he came to God and gave his heart and

¹ Sidney Lanier.

life to Christ, the first time he passed that place afterwards his soul, he told me, was filled by a great transport of joy that all that was done, that it was no longer part of his life, that God had forgiven and forgotten, and cast it behind His back.¹

We need not fear that this Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sin will make sin easy; it is the only thing that can make sin impossible—the light that drives out the darkness, the love of God that fills the heart and leaves no room for evil, not even for evil memory. And God offers to man a reconciliation so complete, a communion so close, that nothing, neither things past, nor things present nor to come, can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord.

God's Everlasting Kindness

Is. liv. 7-10.—‘For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. . . . For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.’

THE Hebrew was in a unique sense the inspired man and seer of the ancient world. He rose now and again almost to the Christian conception of the Love of God. Some, indeed, of those representations of God which are dearest to the Christian have their roots in Hebrew psalm and prophecy, and thus testify to the fact that both prophets and apostles—to use St Paul's mystical phrase—‘drank of one spiritual rock.’ Where, for example, can one find a more touching representation of God's unfailing love than in the parable of the lost sheep—the shepherd going after the stray lamb and seeking until he finds it—a parable which has so appealed to the sympathies of men, that it has been repeated for ages in song and sermon, in story and painting, and has not, to this hour, lost its interest and charm? And yet Jesus did but say what Isaiah had said long before: ‘He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom.’

The text is another wonderful example:

¹ Hugh Black.

‘For a small moment have I forsaken thee. But with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee.’ One must be dull of sense and heart who does not thrill to the beauty of this whole section, full of the grandeur of our human hopes, and of the Divine ways in which they are to be fulfilled.

1. It seems so natural and easy for us to speak of the everlasting kindness and the changeless love of God, that we forget it was a gradual revelation. God is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever; but man is the child of growth, and only slowly is he able to rise to the thoughts of God. Love God always was—for He is Love; but He can only reveal His glory as men are able to perceive it. Yet this truth which men accept most readily they seem the least able to realize. They repeat its classic expressions—the great and beautiful words of prophets and apostles—but the truth itself is not their sure possession, the master-light of all their seeing. One of the saddest and deadliest thoughts which can infect a human spirit is this: ‘I am of little or no value to God. What matters it to Him whether I rejoice or suffer, live or die?’ Yet this thought of God as an impassive force or an infinite indifference at the centre of things is one which often comes to men—even to men who confess with their lips that God is love.

What can it mean? Is it aught to Him
That the nights are long and the days are dim?
Can He be touched by the griefs I bear,
Which sadden the heart and whiten the hair?
Around His throne are eternal calms,
And strong glad music of happy psalms,
And bliss unruffled by any strife;
How can He care for my little life?

When shadows hang o'er me the whole day long,
And my spirit is bowed with shame and wrong;
When I am not good and the deeper shade
Of conscious sin makes my heart afraid,
And the busy world has too much to do
To stay in its course to help me through,
And I long for a Saviour—can it be
That the God of the universe cares for me?

It has also been one of man's constantly besetting weaknesses to believe in a changing Deity. Many sincere Christians have found it

difficult to rise above it. In depressed health or lowered spirits, when care or pain or conscious sin has taken the brightness and buoyancy out of life, we have yielded to morbid doubts. And yet our God has ever been regarding us with all-enduring love, and waiting for our confidence. No change has ever crossed the Everlasting Kindness. Our religion admits of but one quality in God—a quality which is not mere quality but *essence*—love immutable, unchangeable, endless. His wrath—though a great and awful reality—is not infinite and endless in any such sense as is His love. It will pass away as an active energy, when it has done its purifying, disciplinary, and redeeming work. ‘For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.’

2. ‘The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee.’ The material is passing and perishing even in its strongest and stablest forms; but the Divine is enduring and immortal, even in its pity and tender helpfulness.

The mountains and the hills suggest reality, power, fixedness, duration. The Old Testament speaks of them as perpetual and everlasting; and again and again they are thrown into contrast with the mortality of man. The writer of Ecclesiastes was troubled by the thought that human life is so brief and transitory compared with that of Nature. It is a thought we cannot well resist when we stand in the presence of the stable and enduring things of the material universe. The tides which beat and moan upon the shore will continue to flow, and the waves will roll and break as majestically as they do to-day, long ages after our footprints have faded from the sands. The mountains have stood there in grandeur for incalculable years, the snows will crown them, the streams flow down their riven sides, and spring and summer will clothe their lower slopes with green and fill their valleys with wild flowers, when all that is visible and mortal of their lover shall have returned to dust.

¶ Wordsworth’s lines on the Duddon mark this contrast:

Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
The Form remains, the Function never dies;

While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish.

We remember Dante’s intense feeling, with Nature all around him, unchanged and impassive, and his shock that the world should be going on as usual, and Florence be as beautiful and bright, on the day when Beatrice was lying dead. We seem to be in the midst of a vast order of things which goes on fixedly and calmly whatever we do or endure—whether we live or die. The hills and mountains with which our childhood and youth were familiar—these abide. But the men and women and children—where are they?

But these thoughts are thoughts of sadness. And this sense of littleness and frailty, which is produced by our first outlook on Nature, is paralysing. What man wants, for inspiration, and strength, and comfort, is the assurance that, weak and transitory as he seems, he is yet of value in the universe; and it is not a matter of indifference to the Lord of Heaven and earth whether he grieves or is glad, makes the best or the worst of himself and his life. And this assurance he finds in the revelation of the Divine Love: the revelation that he is made in God’s image, and capable of His eternal fellowship.

3. The first and most superficial impression which the mountains make upon the mind—namely, that the Creator has more regard for matter than for mind—is after all a misleading one. The Hebrew prophet looked up to the mountains and hills only that he might look away from them to something more enduring; he thought of them only as a suggestion of what was far more abiding, even the loving-kindness of God. From their lofty heights, and out of their gloomy solitudes, came a Voice to his soul, proclaiming the glorious truth of an eternal kindness resting upon him and his people. We may be assured God does not pour His pity and love on things which cannot receive and reciprocate them. Outward size and consequence are no true index of real worth and lasting value. Thought, and Purpose, and Love are the truly Divine forces of the universe; and because man thinks and wills and loves he is greater than Nature—greater than his dwelling-place—not less. What

joy do the mountains bring to the Creator compared to one passionate human life—brief as it may be, and broken by ignorance, sorrow, and sin? Can we frame any worthy thought of God which excludes the idea of His need of the love and trust and obedience of His children? If Jesus Christ is the best expositor of the Divine character, if the word 'Father' spells the Divine name, then we may speak not only of man's need of God, but reverently, yet boldly, of God's need of man—of a Divine Love which seeks the answering love of its sons and daughters.

And to be loved by God is to partake of His immortality. Because He lives and loves, we shall live and love also. We shall have a place in a Kindness which does not depart, and a share in a Peace which cannot be removed. The hope of immortality—the assurance of unbroken continuity of being and life—is involved in the conviction of personal relationship to a living and loving God. No man who believes in God can possibly think of death as a falling out of Divine Love and fellowship into nothingness. The outer man perishes because it was made to perish, but not the self which holds communion with God, receives His mercy and responds to it. We may give reasons, better or worse, for believing in the endless life of the children of God; but our faith after all comes not from our reasonings, but from our conscious personal relation to Him: from our knowledge and experience of the Fatherhood which Christ revealed.

¶ I saw full surely that ere God made us He loved us; which love was never slackened, nor ever shall be. And in this love He hath done all His works; and in this love He hath made all things profitable to us; and in this love our life is everlasting.¹

4. Let us seek, then, to realize God's love more fully and lovingly, till our faith in it is strong enough to rise above all pessimistic doubts, to defy the terrible facts of evil, and to triumph over the most depressing personal experiences. Change and loss, joy and pain, life and death, are education—the Father's education of His children for a larger destiny; and in that light we are to view all that is painful and terrible in the world and in our human life. Out of the very greatness and

faithfulness of His love, God has bound penalty to transgression because He would make sin itself dreadful. His righteousness cannot be satisfied with mere punishment—only with restoration to goodness. His penalties are proof and sign that He would make and keep us true to Himself. It is this stern insistence, this unrelenting faithfulness, this relentlessness of God's love that is our hope. Hate might let us go, or the fondness which is another form of self-indulgence in weak men and women, but not the love of a holy God, who cannot ignore or pass over sin. His forgiveness cannot mean anything like that: it is not indifference, nor is it the remission of punishment; it is the inward assurance of a Love that is greater than our sin. We may speak of the holiness of God as infinite, but we cannot speak of His wrath as infinite. It is little and passing when compared with the everlasting kindness; lasting while sin lasts, but only to destroy it.

¶ God is our Father, and His eternal purpose towards us is a purpose of infinite love, to draw us out of all our unworthiness into perfect filial trust, and so into perfect participation of His own righteousness and blessedness. We cannot have rightness with God unless we trust in Him, and we cannot have filial trust until we have the assurance of His paternal love, that is of an unextinguishable love which will not indeed withhold any needed punishment, but which no sin of ours can ever weary out or weaken, a love which seeks our righteousness, and will persevere until its object is attained.¹

It is a great thing to be able to believe in the immutable, everlasting love of God. Not to believe in it is the fundamental unbelief. There are men and women everywhere, who, when comparing their present with their past days, cry out bitterly, 'I am a moral wreck; does God care for wrecks?'; who have memories of years wasted, and worse than wasted, which make them think and say, 'God can never look mercifully on such a creature as I have made myself.' But that is not the way to think of God. We add wrong to wrong by doubting His love. Looked at from the side of man alone, there may appear at times a tragic element of uncertainty in the work of human redemption; but there is no faintest shadow of uncertainty when we

¹ Juliana of Norwich.

¹ Thomas Erskine of Linlathen.

think of God, of what He is, and of what He is doing. 'The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee.' To hold fast through all the chances and changes of mortal life to the Goodness that is the same for ever; to rest our hearts on the compassion that fails not when all else seems failing; to be assured that the wrath of God is but another aspect of His kindness and mercy, and that by punishment He saves from sin; to feel that though the mountains crumble, we are still held in the unbroken and unbreakable clasp of Everlasting Love—this is the very victory of life.

Altar Builders

Is. liv. 9.—'This is as the waters of Noah unto me.'

THE early stories of Genesis describe God as talking with men, as sending out angel messengers to examine the world situation, and as giving to Noah the warning whereby he was led to build the ark. Behind these stories there are religious truths of profound value which gain in significance as the centuries pass. Lamech, the son of Cain, standing for the principle of the vendetta, created terror by the threat that he would slay a lad for every scar one of his tribe received. His warlike instincts were encouraged by the new inventions attributed to Tubal-Cain. Man learned how iron and brass, heated in the furnace, could be shaped into arrow-heads, swords, javelins; in that age of invention, humanity chose the wrong direction; its discoveries were turned to unworthy ends, and the result was that God repented that He had made man.

In these days of ours when science has invested man with new powers, he has used his new knowledge often for very noble purposes. The surgeon devoting to the healing of humanity devices unknown to our fathers; the journalist telling in the evening to the peoples of the West the events which have taken place in the Far East in the morning; such workers are equipped as their forefathers were not, but in so many ways we have chosen the wrong direction. Thousands who in an earlier generation would have remained illiterate can now read and write; but is it a gain if many of them read chiefly the sporting

news, and write chiefly betting-slips? The horse has been supplanted by the motor car in our busy thoroughfares, but is humanity really any further on when tank corps take the place of cavalry? These changes have come upon us; and as the Deluge was a judgment on the ancient world, so there came for our generation the waters of Noah, and we saw that we had been following ends which were not the highest.

1. The prophet, recalling the disastrous years of the Exile, out of the sympathy which he felt for the sufferers declared God's message of forgiveness, but, nevertheless, he saw that the national tragedy fitted in with God's righteous plan. The Exile years were 'as the waters of Noah,' a fresh declaration that God could not be mocked. Such world judgments purge the heart of humanity, by declaring God's hatred of sin, and by asserting that the spinal column of the Universe is ethical.

Such a declaration is central in the Christian doctrine of the Atonement; God drew near to His sinful people, showing mercy upon them with everlasting kindness, but in His mercy there had to be due recognition of the gravity of human sin. Men and women who had forgotten God would suffer morally if they found that sin could be dealt with easily, that it could be overlooked and wiped out by one word of God. Our natures, so prone to evil, would have failed to give due recognition to the tragedy involved in sin if God had put it from before His face with the ease of an Omnipotence which could condone evil; so there was necessary an experience which would in a moral universe do justice to the tragic nature of human sin, and which, like the waters of Noah, would purge the heart of humanity by its declaration not only of the Divine love but of God's anger against sin. Here is one aspect from which we look upon Calvary with its suffering and shame; sin was being condemned. In the Cross of Jesus God 'condemned sin in the flesh.'

¶ In a certain war two children whose parents had been killed in a bombardment of the town where they lived were in charge of a rough soldier. The little boy in an argument with another lad used an ugly word which was forbidden in the careful home where he had been brought up. He looked fearfully at

the soldier to see if he had been overheard. The soldier laughed carelessly and said: 'It doesn't matter. Say all of that sort of thing you like.' In a sudden revulsion of feeling the boy burst into tears. 'If you were my father, you would not say that,' he burst out, and then he walked quietly away to play with the other children and to try to forget the sudden thrust of pain. We want to live in a kind universe, but we do not want to live in a universe which is too kind. We do not want to live in a universe which is so kind that it is careless. We want the high moral sanctions to be maintained even when it is against ourselves, and yet we want more deeply than we can say to find a peaceful home in a friendly world despite the folly and the failure of our lives.¹

2. While others mocked, Noah obeyed the Divine voice, and after the Flood had destroyed the inhabitants of the world that then was, he emerged from the ark to raise an altar to God on the fresh mountain sod of a new world. The old conditions had passed away, but not the ancient faith, and the faith was given the first place in the new world. What about the world in which we are?

Two predictions of the coming days have recently been published. Mr H. G. Wells, by inventing the diary of a certain very enlightened Dr Raven, traces the story of humanity until the year 2116. It is apparent that Mr Wells does not believe that we shall for ever remain an unbelieving world, but he says that there will be a time, about 1965, when Christian ministers will no longer be wanted, and slowly, but certainly, organized religion will pass out of existence. In spite of the endeavour to adjust itself to the new conditions indicated by the decision to appoint three Popes, one for Dublin, one for Rome, and a coloured Pope in Pernambuco, organized religion will within fifty years have vanished from its last stronghold in Ireland. There are not a few who seem to regard this as a possible development; if they are right, then any who strive to build an altar are engaged in a hopeless task.

Against this forecast we place the much more moving utterance of Professor Nicholas Berdyaev, until 1922 Professor of Philosophy

in the University of Moscow. He was expelled from Russia because he would not surrender his allegiance to the faith of Jesus. He also, in his book *The End of our Time*, suggests that we are witnessing the decline of an epoch. The day is ending and night awaits us, but may not the night have its own glories? The poet tells us of that first mysterious night in Eden, when the sky, untenanted through the hours of day, became filled with luminaries when evening came and Creation 'widened in man's view.' So, this Russian Professor believes, it will be with humanity. The barbarization of Europe is beginning; the Christianity to which we are accustomed is passing through a very difficult phase. 'Christianity has not failed, but the Christianity of Constantine the Great has failed; we are back to the place in which the Christian Church stood before the time of Constantine and we must conquer the world afresh.'

Many of us are unwilling to agree that the situation is quite as serious as that outlined in this volume, but at any rate we stand, each one of us, like Noah of old amid the swirling water; the mountains are slowly emerging, and we must erect our altar. What does it mean in these days to build an altar to God? When the people of Israel, in a later period, were carried away captive to Babylon, many forgot the true faith, but out of a loyal remnant God built afresh a nation to serve Him; and in our day, though the army of God is infinitely larger than many people imagine, yet it is with those who are prepared to acknowledge Him that Jesus is building out of the ruins of the past the nobler structure of the future.

3. In common with the other nations we have known serious hardship and prolonged disappointment. Hopes have been entertained of improved conditions, only to be disappointed, and it is little wonder that many have lost the resilience of spirit which once they possessed. But God has been very good to our land: He has given courage to thousands who have had a heavy cross to bear, and has maintained in our land, in a day when revolution and sudden change have destroyed confidence in other countries, a certain quietness and national unity which have been the envy of other lands. These are the gifts of God, and, rejoicing in

¹ L. H. Hough, *The Eyes of Faith*, 193.

them, we wish to do all we can to foster the spirit of obedience to God, whereby these great things have remained among us. We must continue to be builders of the faith, supporting amid change the imperishable things which know no change.

¶ In the year 718 there went from this land of ours the missionary afterwards to be known as St Boniface, the apostle to the Germans. In so far as Christianity had been planted in Europe through the Roman occupation, it had been swept away by the barbarians who had come from the north, and all over the land there was the worship of Thor. The missionary, standing alone like Elijah of old, determined to cut down a sacred tree associated for centuries with the pagan worship. The people gathered round in great numbers, believing that some terrible vengeance would descend upon the man who thus threatened the ancient god, but the tree fell, and the missionary remained uninjured, and the people, feeling that their god had shown how powerless he was and that now they had nothing to trust in, listened eagerly to the message of St Boniface. He sent to this country for helpers, and in a relatively short time the land where Thor had been worshipped became filled with Christian churches. From our land went forth the message which changed the heart of Europe.

One difficulty in the Christian Church is that our objective seems to be somehow indefinite; we cannot outline our policy in a short programme and set out to work for it like the Americans in their Recovery Campaign, or the Germans under Hitler. More important than the programme of Christianity is the spirit of the Christian; and in order to display the true spirit we must live as those before whose eyes there ever stands the altar we have raised. What does it mean to be altar builders? Life is full of duties which we dare not neglect; our responsibilities as citizens, our commitments in our homes meet us regularly, and if we neglect these, then we lose our self-respect. But, having done what is demanded of us, there remains what we may do in the spirit of the altar builder. In the New Testament Jesus speaks of those who, when compelled to go one mile, go two. The readiness to go the 'extra mile,' to become inventive in discovering fresh avenues of Christian service, to forget the cost when work for Christ requires to be done,

will keep us true to the spirit of the altar we are trying to build.

'Did you ever notice,' asks Dr A. J. Gossip, 'how much Jesus loved that touch of something extra in a life? Yes, you grumble, and how can I give it Him—I, planted down in a narrow place, in a set round of petty little drudgeries? Yet even there it can be done, and with enormous consequences. If working men would give not just a fair day's work, but added to that something extra, the old pride in what they do, a personal interest in the business that thinks of it proudly as their business, and doesn't mind a half-hour more upon occasion, would not that make all the difference, and bring in contracts that are being lost for lack of it, and lift us as a nation out of this dangerous time? And if employers gave, not just a fair day's wage, but added to that something extra, a touch of human interest and friendship, would not that ease many minds that, toil how they may, are never more than a few days or weeks ahead of grim possibilities that set their souls shivering, not for themselves so much as for their dear ones? And so in all our relationships. Fling in the extra with an eager hand. That is the Christ touch, and our Lord's own way, and what He claims from you and me. "What do ye more than others?" He expects more, not just duty, but that and something added.'

The greater number of Christians are striving, often without much to encourage them, to live a life well-pleasing in the eyes of God. At times weary of self-sacrifice, of thinking for others, they forget their high calling, but usually they are more or less faithful and they wonder if they are achieving much. They are keeping the lights of love and truth burning; they are maintaining every worthy organization which is bringing healing to society and peace among the nations; they are continuing, in a world which is too ready to forget God, the abiding remembrance of the covenant in which God draws nearer to His people, a covenant which, though the mountains depart and the hills be removed, will never be forgotten. Therefore let us, like Noah, continue to build our altars unto the Lord.

God's Invitation

Is. lv. 1, 2.—'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.'

THE Exile left indelible marks upon the Jewish people. Babylon was one of the great centres of the world's trade, and it was then that the Jews formed those mercantile habits, and developed that financial genius which have been both their glory and their shame throughout their subsequent history. We are not to imagine these captives in exile as confined within narrow walls, or even within barbed wire confines like modern prisoners of war. There were, of course, restrictions upon their liberty; but they seem to have been allowed to mingle pretty freely with the people, and also to engage in commerce. Some of them had prospered to such an extent that they had lost the desire to return to their own country, and did not return; but there were others who were always filled with the home-sickness of the exile, and were conscious of that aching sense of loss which comes from the lack of things that money cannot buy. To them the prophet comes, and he speaks of the imperishable things of the Spirit; he speaks to them of God, of righteousness, of duty, of the things that satisfy and give life to the soul.

1. Every one who thinks at all is aware of the temptation to exaggerate what money can do. Men gaze enviously at their fellows, as if possession and enjoyment went together, though the rich man, on his side, recalls sometimes with envy the happy irresponsibility of the days when he was a boy without a sixpence. Of course, he now can go anywhere and see anything, but care goes with him, dulling his enjoyment of all he sees.

¶ Doubtless money has a certain power. Wealthy men impress hotel-keepers, stock-brokers, servants, and society; but most of those that I have known are in a perpetual state of nervous pre-occupation, and it is pathetic to see them harnessed to a life that brings them neither fun, friends, nor freedom. Voltaire writes: 'I love money because I love

liberty,' but this is not true of the wealthy men that I have known. Those who devote their lives to money-making have no liberty.¹

The wealthy man is not free; he is mastered and possessed by his own possessions; and the question often wakens—Is this which I have purchased bread or only a show of bread? I have paid for it as if it were clear gain, with toil and hardness which are real. But there is something mocking and elusive in it; it looks like substance, but it has not the effect of substance. A philosopher would say that this is not surprising, for all the things we look at are of such stuff as dreams are made of, and spirit needs spirit to sustain it. This world on which we walk about is yet, in its build and make, a spiritual thing, and what gives value to anything upon the world is that more than earth is in it. Sun and moon are glorious in their stations, and they lift our hearts with admiration; but suppose there were no mind to observe and admire, what would their glory be? It is the mind that makes the splendour, God's mind speaking to our minds. We ourselves are of mingled earth and air, dust of the ground and breath of God; and the continual delusion of money is that, in ministering to one part of our nature, it can minister to both.

Gold and iron are good
To buy iron and gold;
All earth's fleece and food
For their like are sold.

Sir George Adam Smith, recalling the fact that these chapters were written for exiles, says, 'Of all men, exiles can least forget that there is that which money can never buy. Money and his work can do much for the banished man; they can feed him, clothe him, they can even make for him a second home, and, in time, a kind of second citizenship. But they can never bring him to the true climate of his heart, nor win for him his real life.' Men ask for food, for shelter, for work, but really they ask for greater things than these, since care and strife may poison their food, and mean thoughts make work a drudgery. Jesus, who knew how men are made, marks in the service of Communion His sense of the proportion of our nature. He gives a crumb of bread—so much for the body; and He gives

¹ The Countess of Oxford.

Himself, an immeasurable boon which glorifies the whole of life—and that is for the soul.

No doubt, in the prophet's day as in our own, people of his kind were looked at with impatience by their fellows, as dreamers of dreams and architects of air-castles. We came here, said some, as poor as any of you; but we accepted the situation, and threw ourselves into the larger life of this Empire, and now we have left that sordid narrowness behind. All doors fly open at our coming: in every pleasure and pageant we can have a part, and we are willing to make your fortune with our own. But is it fortune? You are spending money and labour on that which is not bread. You say I am a dreamer of dreams, with this talk of pardon, restoration, God; at least my dreams give me peace. I am a poor man, with no material prospects whatever, but then this life of mine has brought me all that heart desires. If you cannot say as much, it looks as if the delusion were on your side, as if your possessions were of unsubstantial quality. I have a Friend who, hour by hour, in token of His mindfulness, is sending messages of cheer and help to me, and who gives me hope of better things when earth has failed me; has your success brought to you a Friend like that? Which is bread, asks the prophet? This, which money certainly can procure, though it leaves the heart hungry? or the other, which, admitting hunger and privation, yet makes the heart content?

¶ Is there any one who can say before God who searches the heart, 'I am satisfied. I have no sense of thirst, no nameless craving'? Are *you* satisfied? I do not mean, are you tolerably contented and comfortable on the whole and in a general way when things are at their best? But, *satisfied!*—the deep under-the-surface rest and complete satisfaction of the very heart, the filling of its emptiness, the stilling of all its cravings; and this not during the false frothing of excitement or business, but when you are alone, when you lie awake in the night, when you are shut away from any fictitious filling of your cup, and when the broken cisterns have leaked out, as they will, and do, and must—are you satisfied then? Verily, He who knew what was in man knew that He was not narrowing the invitation when He said, 'Let him that is athirst, come!' ¹

¹ F. R. Havergal, *The Royal Invitation*.

¶ The Chinese have an inscription over the glorious Jade Fountain in Peking, 'Under Heaven, the First Spring.' As earthly springs go I suppose it is the most wonderful that the world possesses. But as I gazed into its crystal depths I said to my friend, 'This is glorious, but the Christian has discovered the real "Under Heaven, the First Spring," for "he that drinketh of these waters shall thirst again, but he that drinketh of the waters that Christ shall give unto him shall never thirst, but the waters that Christ shall give unto him shall become in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."' ¹

2. There are some who would gladly be content at heart, but they hesitate about the price. They have many cares and worries, and frequent disappointments, for life has not given to them all that it promised. What makes care perpetual is that they refuse to receive life from God as a gift. They have heard so often this free offer of life and salvation that they are tired and incredulous. If the prophet asked some great thing, they would do it, but this proposal has a look of meanness which moves their distrust. 'Is this the mighty ocean?' cried a man when he first came in sight of it; is this all? Yes, all; but how small a part of it do your eyes survey? Only trust yourself to it; sail abroad over it, and you will find that it will carry you round the world. It has no end.

When we think of it, it is not only grace that is free, but all earth's finest things. Love itself has no price, or friendship with its steadfast loyalty, or the chivalrous defence of the weak. In fact, wherever a man helps his fellow on the great scale, the thought of payment becomes irrelevant, and we have simply to bend our pride to receive; or, if we offer anything, it is not as an equivalent, but, at best, as a faint token that we have recognized. But though we know that, the habit of a commercial civilization has taken hold of us, with its rude standard of a price for everything, and we are incredulous and a little suspicious of whatever is said to cost nothing.

And yet, to us also, it is a pleasure to give. We know how to give good gifts to our children and should not our Father know? He makes His sun to shine on evil and good; He does not

¹ E. Stanley Jones, *Christ and Human Suffering*, 140.

talk about repayment to those who are in His debt.

There is no price on the lavish summer,
And spring is free to the meanest comer.

Love travels down more easily than it climbs; the love of parents for their children has always been richer and more self-sacrificing than that of children for their parents; and we must not wonder if the love of God is inconceivably greater, more magnanimous, and more patient than the love of man to God. St Paul, in his Roman letter, dwells on the thought of the multitudinous offences of men—a whole world gone astray, a world enfeebled, degraded, enslaved, with each generation passing on to that which follows the inheritance of a huge catastrophe. It is a shoreless sea of gloom. But then the Apostle lifts his eyes, and looks upon another immeasurable fact: 'Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly, that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness to eternal life.' And so for Paul, as for George Fox in his vision, a wider sea of light and benediction flows over that dark sea of grief, and in the end nothing is left but grace. That is what Jesus shows in life and death. God's way of winning back the world of men is not by giving and receiving, His doing so much in order to encourage us to do all we can; He wins men back by giving with both hands. And in order that He might the better give what was His, He took what was ours, entering into our conditions, sharing our exclusions, taking our fault upon His heart, so that, being in fellowship with us, He might give us all He had. 'Take, eat,' He said, 'it is my body, and it is for you.'

That is God's way; His gift is for those who have no money. The want of title, which makes men shy of Him, is really the best of titles. The sense of remoteness is better than any fancied nearness. If you have never looked His way before, He is doubly glad that your eyes should turn now to Him who has sought for you. It is not possible, if we take Jesus at His word, to be too frank in stating our case to God; it is not possible to be too insistent or too clamorous. Jesus smilingly used the image of an improvident neighbour battering at a cottage door at midnight to get

the bread he should have thought about before; and He said to all faint-hearted petitioners, conscious that they have no stateable plea, 'Do not leave off: you will get all you want.' There is no way in which men please God so much as by suffering Him to give them all He will.

¶ 'Last night,' says Andrew Bonar in his Diary, 'in reviewing the past, nothing shamed me so much as the sin of *praying little*, when we might ask in Christ's name so much and receive so much. We have stood at the well all day, and scarce drawn up a few drops.'

God's Thoughts and Ours

Is. lv. 8, 9.—'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

THE verses immediately preceding the text and with which it is connected are a great and moving appeal addressed to wayward and rebellious people, beseeching them to turn to God. The prophet assures them that if they so return—no matter how far they have wandered or how deeply they have sinned—God will abundantly pardon. And then, conscious that he has said a great thing, an almost incredible thing, a thing which to men would be impossible, he adds this word: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.' This statement is made to justify the promise that God will abundantly pardon. It is as if the prophet said to men who were staggered by that great promise, 'You must not judge God by our human standards. You must not apply our human limitations to the love of God. His thoughts are not our thoughts, but as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.'

1. *The Contrast of God's Forgiveness and Ours.*—We may turn the words about in many ways and put meanings into them, but what was first in the prophet's intention was to assert that God forgives, as He does all else, on a large scale.

Nemesis is lame, said the Greeks: but

though slow in coming the judgment does come one day, and the victim cries and prays in vain. In the scientific guise of heredity the same idea recurs to-day, and many, if their minds were searched to the bottom, would be found to have no real faith in a God who forgives. Béranger speaks of 'the God of good-natured folk,' a God not unreasonably strict, who can, on occasion, be blind to human slips; and in Christian churches many prayers are addressed to that 'Dieu des bons gens.' The trouble is that, when penalty begins to press, these people have no faith to help them. A God who does not make too much of little sins they can understand, but a God who forgives, when the sin is very great, passes all their comprehension; and when the evil days come they are left without a hope.

The fault of all our human theories about forgiveness is that, in the process of explaining, we seem to narrow it; and thus we turn back to words which are better than human, as they come from Christ Himself, when He speaks of the father, who saw his son a great way off, and ran and fell on his neck. In that there is a grand theological artlessness; it seems to say that God forgives, not because a man is sorry, or because some condition or other is satisfied, but, at the bottom of all, because, in His heart, He wants His son back again. And in three successive parables Jesus declared that God knows the human joy of finding lost things. 'He will abundantly pardon.'

¶ "When he was yet a great way off." We are as good as told, then, that day after day the father had been watching. . . . "Oh, my friends," said the preacher, "just consider that it is this upon which Jesus, the Son of God, has put His stamp, not the lecture, not chastisement, not expiation, but an instant unquestioning embrace, no matter what the wrong may have been."¹

And what Jesus showed us of the *method* of forgiveness opens up the wonder of the heart of God. We say of a man suffering for wrongs he has done that he deserves it; and we stand aside whilst the judgment works itself out. But He, seeing men under the penalty which they had procured, thrust Himself into their lot, becoming their companion in penalty, and bore their sins in His own body. He took the fault as if it were His, in order to help them

out of it; and He told us that that is the mind and way of God. We scarcely know what forgiveness is on earth. Even after a reconciliation relations remain clouded. Men may not quarrel, but something of the grudge remains; and if they forgive it is for once or twice, for few have patience to go with Peter to the seventh time, and then the heart, with all its gathered rancour, gets its way. Forgiveness is a hard thing, hard to bestow and hard to receive, as most of us have found; and so long as we think of God in the light of that human experience, it must be with reluctance. But His ways are not as ours; when He pardons He pardons out and out. What you need, says the prophet, is to know the greatness of the heart of God, for all your human measures are irrelevant. He will abundantly pardon; He saves unto the uttermost: He will not remember our sins.

The tenderest heart

Has limits to its mercy: God has none.
And man's forgiveness may be true and sweet,
But—He stoops to give it. More complete
Is love that lays forgiveness at thy feet,
And pleads with thee to raise it.

2. *The Contrast of God's Thought and Ours.*—

This man, throughout his prophecy, uses the objects and spectacles of Nature as so many sacraments of God, and here he finds his lesson in the rain. 'As the rain cometh down from heaven, and returneth not thither but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth fruit and bud, so shall my word be; it shall not return unto me void.'

Our thoughts are often mere glimpses of the skirts of an idea which passes us by; every man has mind and memory haunted by such ineffectual ghosts, which never work in the life of the world, or are added to its sum of truth. But God's thoughts are all on the way to become things, just as the rain coming down makes the earth to bring forth and bud. This earth itself, and the system in which it has a place, and the vaster systems which baffle our imagination, all had their beginning in the thought of God; and the solemn and terrific process by which they move towards their destiny is also the exhibition of a Divine thought. Each man of us, with his little sphere of influence, his company of friends, his

¹ Mark Rutherford, *Catharine Furze*, 217.

children, is himself a living centre of power, which has to do with the life of the world in generations yet to come; and each of us is nothing else than a realized thought of God. The Word, the Eternal Thought and Reason of God, became flesh; a thought became a thing, and the hearts of men in every land are upheld in goodness to-day by the power of that thought of God. That marks the contrast of God's thought and ours; not that human thoughts are always ineffectual, but the fairest and pleasantest of them have no force behind or within them to set them forth upon the actual world.

There is nothing that works so powerfully against faith as the sense of the futility of human thoughts. We have our visitings of light, our movements of contrition, our touches of nobler desire. The trouble is that the light only flickers for a moment, and then the darkness falls. We often wish for better things, but the imperious claims of the actual assert themselves, and the longing remains without result; and men grow sceptical of the brave assertion that by an act of faith they might break their bonds for ever and be free. Well, if it were man's thoughts only which are involved, the doubt might well be warranted, but there is God's thought in it; and the prophet hints to us how the life of a man who believes and obeys is environed by enduring things. The change in the man himself may be infinitely little and precarious; his neighbours may be unconscious that anything has happened; and yet, in his act of faith, he has passed out into the sphere of Divine things, which grow, and work, and outlast the earth itself. His will wavers, his goodness lies in moods which come and go, his vision is unsteady; and if his thought were all, it well might come to nothing. But it was a Divine thought which arrested him, a gift of heaven like the rain which comes from above to do its work. It was a thought of God, God's personal and discriminating love, which found him out and mastered him; and that does not return void, it prospers in the thing whereto God sent it. To trust to our own resolves for our salvation would be vain indeed; but steadfast things appear about us, words which cannot be broken, powers which uplift and uphold, constraints from which men may not break away. These thoughts and powers

are great to-day in the sight of some of us, but they will grow greater and clearer with the passing years, whilst other things decay. 'I am the Lord, I change not,' He says, 'therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.' There is great rest of heart in the assurance that God's thoughts are not as ours.

3. *The Contrast of God's Character and Ours.*—

The prophet reminds us of this in order to admonish us. He says, 'Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, . . . for my thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord.'

It is thoughts of God's thinking which we need to set us right, and, remember, they are not as our thoughts. A man cannot come to the great God and remain himself, little and mean and suspicious; he has to give up something, to clear his mind of something, to get another heart and other eyes. When a man does come to God, it is as if he looked from the other side of the sky, seeing the same things but from another standpoint. His fault, which seemed excusable in a trivial earth, is now serious and great; repentance is nothing else than the sight, for a moment, of sin as God sees it. And Jesus, the man of Nazareth, the dim, far-off figure, with a kind of idyllic charm and pathos about it, is seen with other eyes, seen now as God sees Him, in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell.

When our thoughts about life are put away that we may get God's thoughts, Christ becomes the gift of God's heart to us, a Deliverer in whom the power of our new life consists, an Enlightener from whom we learn how to think of God and man. 'If any man be in Christ,' says Paul, 'he is a new creature: old things have passed away, behold they have become new.' His former judgments, his estimate of great and small are changed; he finds himself in a new earth. It is no power of earth that can work a change like that, but the redeeming will of God, who is able also to subdue all things unto Himself.

¶ Five years ago I came to believe in Christ's teaching, and my life suddenly became changed: I ceased desiring what I had wished before, and began to desire what I had not wished before. What formerly had seemed good to me appeared

bad, and what had seemed bad appeared good. . . . The direction of my life, my desires became different: what was good and bad changed places.¹

God's Self-disclosure

Is. lv. 8, 9.—'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

THERE is a forceful adjective twice only used by St Paul in his letters and in both cases translated 'unsearchable.' 'How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past tracing out'; 'the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Into this word are apparently gathered two ideas. It may be applied to that which is so lofty or so deep that it cannot be exhaustively explored. If astronomers were thinking of the spaces of the firmament, or divers of the profound depths of the ocean, they might rightly describe them as 'unsearchable.' But most fitting is the epithet when employed of God: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God.'

The other idea implicit in the word is this: there are riches which men can seek and find; they may suffer immeasurable hardships, but gold rewards their toil; they bring pearls from the ocean depths and treasures from the earth's dark mines. But there are some riches which, seek as ardently and perseveringly as they may, men can never by their own efforts discover; gold and jewels and radium they may find, but not 'the riches of Christ'; they are 'unsearchable.'

1. There are those who hold that religion is possible without a belief in revelation. A distinguished scientist has published a book, *Religion without Revelation*, in which he maintains that, though God is unknowable, he experiences the sense of the sacred in life, and in loyalty to the demands of the sacred he finds his religion. But to believe in the sacred without believing in God is to believe that a tree can live without its roots. Another great scientist, Sir Arthur Eddington, has declared that the question of questions for men is not whether there is a God, but whether God has revealed Himself. Alike unfathomable and

unsearchable by any efforts of men, He must disclose Himself if man is to know and love Him, and, buoyed by that knowledge, to persevere in that love unto the end. There are myriads to-day who would find it well-nigh impossible to believe in a spiritual and moral purpose in the world, had not God in His Self-disclosure given the vital secret of the Universe and unveiled the eternal mystery of the Divine Life.

¶ Plato conceived the idea that, if a perfectly righteous man should ever live among men, he would not be received with welcome; there would be no reaction of responsive love; but he would be reviled, tortured, and impaled. The great philosopher could conceive this fate for a saint because he was so subtle an observer of human nature, but he knew that without revelation man could but guess at the truth; his thoughts would be but the fallible thoughts of man. Plato was dimly feeling towards the declaration of the Hebrew prophet, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.'

2. Thus the heart of the gospel is necessarily news about God, the news which in the fullness of time He has given; 'God hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son.' The question of questions of which Eddington speaks has been answered. God has given to men His Thought, that Thought which became flesh and dwelt among us. The primary message which the Church has to carry to mankind is that God has spoken, and that this Word Incarnate abides for ever in and among mankind. It is when we put this Thought of God side by side with the thoughts of men, that we recognize that all the united genius of the human intellect and all the wistful cravings of the human heart could never have arrived at the splendour of our Christian faith. Men can invent an Apollo or a Krishna, but it would take a Jesus to invent a Jesus, as has been most truly said.

First and foremost, then, the message is an evangel about God. It is not merely that we bring a message from God. A Deity veiled, hidden, unknown, might conceivably send a message to men and bid His servants spread it throughout the world. In pagan days men sought at Delphi for instructions and advice, and believed that God spoke. If the gospel

¹ Tolstoy.

were moral counsel only, the Sermon on the Mount might well suffice. But the gospel is that Deity is unveiled; we have good news not only from God, but of God; not merely moral ideals, but God Himself disclosed. We point to the Babe in the manger, to the working Lad at Nazareth, to the Man who walked the hard and stony ways of life, to the Crucified on Calvary, to the Conqueror of death in the garden of the Resurrection, to the King reigning on a throne, to the Eternal Priest interceding in the heavens, to the indwelling Christ abiding in human hearts by faith, and declare: 'Behold your God.'

3. But further: God's Thought must become man's way. Theology issues in religion. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' said Jesus Christ. The Truth which has become the Way communicates the Life, that redemptive Life which is the sole hope of this suffering, wayward race. Mistaken thoughts, false thoughts, have led inevitably to mistaken ways and false ways: 'My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.'

If we were to choose the characteristic symbol of the Hindu way, it would probably be a naked, ash-smearing *sanyasi*, who has abandoned every home relationship and flung aside every human tie. If we were seeking a picture of the Moslem way, we should most likely call to mind some great mosque crowded with white-robed men (no women in view), bowing rhythmically in unison before Allah; and maybe there would be a sympathetic thrill in Christian hearts at the thought of that moving sight. If we were to recall for ourselves the expression of the Buddhist way, it would be the image of the still Buddha wrapped in contemplation, undisturbed by and heedless of the agonies of mankind. The way of self-seeking renunciation, the way of masculine adoration, the way of impassive contemplation, each of them failing because in great part they have not found the inner truth of the Object of their search.

¶ In the great influenza epidemic which followed the War seven millions at least perished in India, and thousands lay helpless on the roads. A woman doctor, finding a sick man in a street, appealed to two Hindu *sanyasis* to help her to carry him to a hospital, and was met with the indignant reply, 'But we are holy men.'

¶ I hardly knew what it meant that the Founder of our Faith died for that faith until I stood before the almost sublime Daibutsu at Kamakura. This vast Buddha is one of the great statues of the world, and shows the Light of Asia in a profound reverie. It is abstract, universal, elusive, fascinating, the *vita contemplativa* made bronze. I loved it as great art. But how remote, how detached, how impossible, even for the unimpassioned East, to-day! My mind turned inevitably to the strenuous Christ, not crouched in rapture over a thought but stretched in passion on a Cross—that Cross which was the supreme moment in the history of God.¹

God's Thought made flesh, the Eternal Word incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended, is the way of redeemed life and therefore of 'newness of life.' 'God sent forth his Son'; there is the Divine Thought. 'God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts'; there is the Divine Way, the redemptive Way, the Way of new values, new motives, new power, and a new end. It is the Way of new values, for all values are gathered up into the supreme value of the human spirit, worth to the Father the death of Christ. It is the Way of new motives, for all motives are gathered up into the single motive hidden in the words, 'He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.' It is the Way of new power, for the Christian is he who is in Christ and has the Christ-life in him; 'I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.' It is the Way of the new end, for 'Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come,' 'the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

God's Prevailing Word

Is. lv. 10, 11.—'For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.'

1. *God's Word*.—It is proper for Christians to interpret God's 'word' as involving the whole Christian dispensation and purpose. St

¹ S. M. Shoemaker, *Realizing Religion*, 66.

John describes our Lord as the *Logos*, the very utterance of God. What does Jesus express? Surely that God is love, and that therefore it is His will and promise to deliver us from the thralldom of sin, and to bless us with fullness of life and happiness. Salvation! That is God's word to men.

The promise of deliverance and bliss was made through the prophet to the whole Jewish people, and the Christian development of that promise has undoubtedly a national application. God has laws for nations as for Nature; and although the precise form of their application may be ambiguous here and there, there can be no doubt as to their general principles. We know it is God's will and rule that nations should esteem righteousness more than mammon, and fellowship more than moloch. He has given us statutes and ordinances to observe and to do. It is well for statesmen to study them. The art of government ultimately depends upon their observance. The setting aside of those eternal principles enunciated by Jehovah to the Jews of old can lead only to disaster. History supplies too many melancholy illustrations for anyone to doubt that. On the other hand righteousness does indeed exalt a nation, and blessings inestimable abound where God's broad principles are made the foundation of national life. The 'word' is effective, and prospers in the thing whereto it is sent.

Likewise with individual men and women. God's 'word' uttered in the gospel and expounded in the Church is designed to save imperishable personalities from sin and shame, and to bring them true enduring life. In this, as in its national mission, it returneth not void, but attains its end. Observation and experience bear unshakeable witness to the power of the 'word' to make good. Wherever the gospel of Christ has been given free course, wherever men have faithfully endeavoured to cultivate its spirit and to live by its principles, it has borne a harvest of inestimable worth.

But such results can only be reaped where certain conditions are fulfilled. What are those conditions? The splendid sacraments of the processes of Nature to which the prophet so aptly refers will help us to find the answer.

2. *Man's Co-operation.*—The rain and the snow do not themselves fructify. They water

the earth; but the earth has an indispensable share in the process of growth. There are precious elements in the rain and snow which, left to themselves, would be sterile; but in contact with certain chemical properties in the soil, they bear fruit. Wherever the subject of attainment is dealt with in the Bible, and notably in the Parable of the Sower, this necessity of co-operation is plainly set forth. The prophet did not tell the Jews that Jehovah would deliver them by irresistible omnipotence or by the subtler methods of magic. The people themselves must deliberately seek and call upon the Lord. More than that, they must repent of their evil ways, forsake them utterly, and turn again to the Lord their God, to work in union with Him. Then, and not till then, could God's 'word' prosper and bear its rich fruit.

The same Divine principle is operative to-day, and has become even more obvious and convincing through the light that is thrown upon it by the science of psychology. Evidence has accumulated that we ourselves have a share in generating every experience. Things are not just projected from outside. God does not merely work externally; and it is not for us to stand by and passively watch Him achieving. God works in us and through us. We have an essential share in the fulfilment of God's purpose in the world. Recognizing this fact, we shall desist from merely sentimental longings and cease to waste time in helpless complaint that there is so much evil in the world; we shall realize that God is just waiting for us to work with Him in the increase of those qualities that are essential to the blessings we long to attain. We must bring ourselves into line with God: hating the things He hates, and loving the things He loves, co-operating with Him to make the world what He would have it be.

¶ In a recent exhibition a little company gathered about a man who took from his vest-pocket a box which contained a miniature steam engine. Its base was the size of a threepenny piece, and its boiler contained a dozen drops of water, more or less; but he lighted the tiny alcohol lamp, the water boiled, and the microscopic engine worked. He set it down on the base of the great engine that operated all the machinery of the Exhibition, and the two ran side by side. The machinery

of man is too clumsy for such an engine to share the labour of operating the Exhibition. But with God it is not so. It is permitted me to run a tiny thread to the great band-wheel of the universe, and yoke my energy with God's. It is not much, to be sure; and the few drops of alcohol in my lamp are burning fast; but I am not merely a part of the machinery that is being run; I am a part of the power that operates and controls.¹

3. *Patience.*—We all ask ourselves sometimes: Why does so beneficent a purpose as God's tarry so long? Why does the 'word' not prosper more swiftly? Well, it is not just a question of God's will or power. We have observed that His unalterable way is to work with and through men. Progress is a co-operative movement. Let us confess that God is having to work with poor partners. The problem is complicated for Him, and therefore for all, because progress involves the uplifting of frail and imperfect men. Their own deliberate assent is essential, otherwise how would they be saved? And let us remember this: apart from the saving of men, there can be no saving of the world. But it must not be thought that because there is no startling advance there is no improvement. Here again, God teaches through Nature. We have seen the snow lie thick upon the ground, and in that state it seems merely obstructive; but a few months later we may see a crop of golden wheat where that snow lay, and the snow has helped to produce it. Let us learn to give God time to work out His sovereign will.

¶ 'Every common day,' wrote George MacDonald, 'he who would be a live child of the living has to fight the God-denying look of things, to believe that, in spite of their look, they are God's, and God is in them, and working His saving will in them.'

4. *Assured Victory.*—To-day, as in Isaiah's time, one of the greatest needs is the rekindling of hope and faith in the hearts of men. God's 'word' cannot but prosper and bring blessings where it is given free course. This is as plainly attested in history as it is asserted in the Bible. And even in this generation do we not see glimpses of the Divine process? Whatever disappointments we still experience, there are

¹ W. E. Barton, *My Faith in Immortality*.

signs that the general trend of the world is towards the eternal goal of God. We may interpret as a parable the fact that the rain and the snow come from above, from the heavens. The gospel of salvation must prosper because it comes from above, from God who is All-Sovereign as well as All-Good. Despite some happenings that suggest the contrary, we believe that God is in command of all the forces in the universe, that He is supreme. It is well for us to renew from time to time our faith in His power. When the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened he saw the mountain ablaze with horses and chariots of fire. God grant us in time of doubt and perplexity the reassurance of such a vision.

On the far reef, the breakers
Recoil in shattered foam,
Yet still the sea behind them
Urges its forces home:
Its chant of triumph surges
Through all the thunderous din—
The wave may break in failure,
But the tide is sure to win.

O mighty sea! Thy message
In clanging spray is cast;
Within God's plan of progress,
It matters not at last,
How wide the shores of evil
How strong the reefs of sin—
The wave may be defeated,
But the tide is sure to win.

Instead

Is. lv. 13.—'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.'

WHAT did Jesus Christ come into the world to do? We say He came to make a new world. That is a very comprehensive answer to the question—too comprehensive to be of much good to us. Let us seek for something a little more compassable. We need not look farther for it than in the words 'Instead of the thorn.' The thorn has always been the symbol of the useless things, the little, sharp, cruel things of the world. It is a parable of life, uncultured, untrained, and unproductive. Jesus Christ

came to make war on the thorns and all that they represent. And, that being so, we cannot deny that the purpose of the gospel is at least practical, serviceable, and necessary. There is a poetry, a romance, an idealism about the teaching of the New Testament and about the life and character of its great central Figure—the Teacher, the historic Christ—that has led some to count Him the Dreamer of a beautiful dream. When men dream they dream of roses, but when the prophet looked forward, and told, in words greater and truer than he knew, the story of the Christ who was to be, he said, ‘He shall deal with thorns.’ That is the real problem of human life—or a large part of the problem.

1. Life is full of sharp and pointed things. There is so much that tears and wounds, so much that makes the way painful for them that tread it. ‘Instead of the thorn,’ or to translate the symbol into the thing for which it stands, instead of the useless, the vain, the worthless; instead of the fretful, the encumbering, the retarding; instead of pain and blood and anguish—a world without thorns. How can it be true that anything could ever root up the brambles and destroy them?

We find the answer folded in the one word ‘Instead.’ These things are not going simply to be rooted up, they are going to be crowded out. There is going to be no room for them. The death of the thorn is to be a side-issue in the growth of the fir tree. The brier shall languish because the myrtle tree flourishes. The fir and the myrtle shall strike their roots down deep into the ground, and shall draw all its nutritive forces into their finer, stronger life. They shall reach upward towards the sun, and drink his warmth into their whole being; and the brambles clinging beneath them shall find no food for their hungry roots and no sunshine for their prickly branches.

That is the way God is at work in the world. The thorn and the brier are sin and selfishness; the fir and the myrtle are holiness and sacrifice. No moral effort that has for its final issue only the destruction of sin can hope to be successful. The motive is inadequate, and the undertaking is impracticable. We cannot fight the moral battle armed with negatives—no matter how sound those negatives may be. Jesus did not come to destroy thorns. He came to grow fir trees.

¶ When the Algerian Railway was being constructed, parts of the line ran through districts laden with miasma; the railroad operatives were continually stricken with fever. An Australian pleaded the curative power of the eucalyptus-tree, which has the property of destroying miasma. Several miles of trees were planted, and in the heart of what was once a fever-laden district there now stands a sanatorium.¹

2. This principle of displacement, this ousting of evil by good, runs through the whole teaching of our Lord. Read the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon was the manifesto of the spiritual kingdom which Christ founded among men. There is comparatively little reference in that sermon to the world as Christ found it. He knew it was a proud, cruel, impure, strife-riven world. He might have said, ‘Cursed be the proud, the cruel, the impure, and the contentious—and all their ways.’ But He did not. That would have been paying too much attention to the thorns. He said, ‘Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers.’

‘Overcome evil with good.’ There is no other way. No man ever successfully tackled thorns unless he had a vision of firs and myrtles to inspire him. ‘Instead.’ There is a fine positive motive there. When a man takes up a tract of land in one of the new countries his first work is to clear it of all its useless growths. But he is not spurred on by some deep-founded animosity against those acres of rank and tangled growths. He has another vision in his eyes as he endures, day after day, the strain of that exacting labour. He can see wide fields of wheat ripening in the sun. He has a vision of orchard and garden and crop. It is the principle of displacement at work. It is the thing that is to be that is nerving him to make war on the thing that is.

Let us apply this principle of displacements to ourselves—our own hearts. It is more easily realizable there than anywhere else. If it is difficult to conceive the idea of a thornless world, substitute the idea of a thornless life. Think of one man with no bitterness in his words, no selfishness in his plans, no meanness in his desires, and no hardness in his heart. Tell ourselves that such men we ought to be,

¹ F. C. Spurr.

and believe it, and we shall straightway be doing our first and most immediate duty in the matter of ousting the thorns.

3. 'Instead of the thorn'—'instead of the brier.' There is something very uncompromising about that programme. It means something to take the place of these things—a real, radical change. There is the philosophy of regeneration, of the new life, in these words. It is but a parabolic way of saying, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature! old things have passed away.' It is not the old life furnished up a bit. That is not God's way. He is Divinely impatient with the thorns and the briars. He says, I will grow something better. These things shall be starved out, crowded out. In the struggle for existence I will oppose to them stronger, fitter, more living things, and they shall die. There is only one thing that can drive out sin, and that is holiness. It is no good saying, I will not do wrong—unless you also say, I will do right.

But it would be untrue to the facts of life and its existing convictions if one were to speak as if this principle of displacement were an easy one to accept, or an effortless one to fulfil. 'Instead of the thorn.' No man can understand these words if he is afraid to look into the face of pain. The King of this ideal kingdom to be, came to His throne with a Crown of Thorns about His brow. It has ever been so, and it must be so. Thorns always draw blood. 'Instead of the thorn'—there is a tragedy here, a world of endurance and patience and pain.

The history of this world's betterment is one long illustration of what it costs to plant fir trees where only thorns grew before. And if you trace the story of that betterment to its origin, you come to the foot of a Cross. All the way of His life the Saviour of the world had the thorns about His path, but He turned not aside. At last they crowned Him with their crown of pain, and He knew Himself the world's King. Whether it be a public wrong or a personal besetment, we cannot touch it to remove it unless we have a willingness to bear pain, some vision of the good that comes of bearing it, and utter faith in One who for us bore the whole pain of sin, and saw the whole vision of good.

Disfigured—? Nay, transfigured utterly, Since every wound a sign is that in thee God hath appeared;—bound thee, and set thee free

Crowned with His blossoms, everlastingly!
—Blossoms wine-red and thorned, that tremblingly

Broke into flower, from a self-raised tree
Whereon thou laid'st thy body: yea, even as He

Who to the last suffered extremity
Of death and desolation,—unto thee
'Tis given to suffer thus, vicariously.¹

The Way of Peace

Is. lv. 13.—'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.'

1. THESE words are a promise of what would happen in this world, and would happen now, if the Spirit of God—which is faith and hope and love—were to enter upon the effective control of human life. The thorns and the briars would disappear. The words which we speak in the bitterness of our soul, the things we say in malice and in envy, with the very purpose of giving pain—such words would never cross our lips if at the source of our life there sat enthroned a Holy Presence wielding power. And even if such things should still take place in the world, if there should still be cruel and petty souls, indulging their evil spirit upon those about them, nevertheless, if deep in the lives of those whom they are trying to hurt, the spirit of peace should be habitually at home, such words, though aimed like arrows and having the poison of arrows, would glance aside, doing no harm.

¶ 'What has been the effect upon him of all the trouble?' we asked a guest who had been telling us of her father, and of how he had suffered from injustice. 'It has left him unable to think an unkind thought of anyone,' she answered.²

¶ 'If I were to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well close,' said President Lincoln. 'I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing so till the end.'

¹ Winifred A. Cook.

² Amy Carmichael, *Gold by Moonlight*, 80.

'If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.'

2. All good people in our day are greatly concerned about what, from various points of view, we feel to be the problem of our modern life. It is all so complex, so entangled and intricate. We see that we cannot deal in any thorough way with one thing without going on to deal with other things, and unless we have a great and happy faith in God—that He is always with us, helping us in unimaginable ways when, for the sake of some aspect of His Kingdom, we rouse ourselves to action—unless we have some such invigorating faith, we slacken in our purposes, feeling that the task is too great, or that, by our dealing effectively with one thing, we may have loosened the foundations of other things more precious. And yet the entire problem of our life is always capable of the very simplest solution—if, indeed, the solution could only be adopted. And that solution simply is the general acceptance by us all, in our various conditions, of the rule of Jesus Christ. Think of the contrivances to which we must meanwhile have recourse because we suspect one another, because we are afraid of what others would do against us, against our interests, if they were at liberty to do them. The whole machinery of barred doors, of locks and keys, of police, of arms, of diplomacy, of treaties in restraint of trade, of international ritual—what is the basis on which it all rests except this, the elementary fear and distrust of one another, which Jesus Christ came into the world to abolish, and which one day He will abolish.

¶ George Bernard Shaw wrote, 'I am ready to admit that after contemplating the world and human nature for nearly sixty years, I see no way out of the world's misery but the way which would have been found by Christ's will if He had undertaken the work of a modern practical statesman.' 'Though we crucified Christ on a stick, He somehow managed to get hold of the right end of it . . . and if we were better men we might try His plan.'

It is true that the adoption of the mind of Christ as the governing principle of our private behaviour and of our public policies will introduce us to dislocations and reconstructions for

which at the moment we fear we are not prepared. But that again is just our want of faith in God, our want of confidence in what is surely the last principle of our religion, namely, that God will see us through the consequences and results of any action which is dictated to our reason and conscience by His mind operating upon our mind. Certainly if things on the large scale are ever to be greatly improved, if certain rumbling sounds are not to mature in an electric storm which may convulse the world, and bury, as under floods of lava, the best achievements of an epoch, it will only be by the hearty acceptance of that faith in the power of holy ideas, and gracious personalities, which was Christ's message to the world. Without Christ, we shall have changes, dislocations, revolutions which will only result in one system of organized self-seeking supplanting another system. With Christ, or without, great changes are already on the way. With Him, though as a long result, it will be such a change as from a world of thorns to a world of benignant trees. Without Christ, without love, without pity, without faith in the soul, without respect for the sacredness of the human personality, without the sense of a Holy God as final Judge and Referee, it can be nothing but *a war in the night*.

3. 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.' Is not this the meaning—that the way to destroy the thorn is to plant the fir, and to destroy the brier to plant the myrtle tree? Whatever be true of the natural world, in the world of the soul the growth of the fir tree is the death of the thorn. Is it not the case that small irritations die in the presence of a true sorrow? Life loses its power to chafe us, its power to enrage us in any petty and futile way, the moment a great emotion floods our heart—a great love, a great pity, a great gratitude. In our blindness, we will not plant in our lives these holy things. We will not yield ourselves up to the steady fulfilment of some high calling for ourselves. And so God, because He loves us, sends some mighty thing to sweep away the trifling things which were destroying our souls with their petty irritations and petty satisfactions.

We are not the conscious sons of God until there broods over our soul some great concern

—it may be for our own deliverance from unworthy things, or it may be some great pity for another, or some great love. Are there not those who, as they look back upon life, can see that that was how God dealt with them? Are there not those who can recall days when their lives were more worried, more oppressed with the ups and downs of petty things, than is their case to-day? Days, it may be, when they themselves had a sharp and biting tongue, an ill-natured manner, ready to deal harshly or with a morbid, unrelenting, justice, without generosity. Or days when the life of their home was a frankly secular thing, when each member fought for his own hand, when there was no final plea in the name of Christ with which to soften the general asperity and querulousness. But they thank God all that is now past. They thank God that their heart has lost its pride, their tongue its savageness, their home its self-seeking and disorder and unhappiness. And how did the change come about? In every case, God brought over them, did He not? some great overshadowing thing, and that crowded out and destroyed by neglect the world of biting undergrowth. Such homes there are, and they remain, in our tempestuous world, for those who have the blessed privilege of knowing them, like green and sunny islands in a stormy sea—homes where God once entered in some great cloud of tenderness, where it may be some prattling voice was stilled, and husband and wife and children and God drew near one another to bear each other up.

Life's To-morrow

Is. lvi. 12.—'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

OF course they are quite wrong, for they were not sober when they said it. As if to-morrow were a thing in these revellers' grip, or as if they could even be sure of such a thing. They forget that the fingers of a hand may write their doom on the very walls of the banqueting chamber.

1. We have a habit of expecting that what has been will be, and yet we can give no sufficient reason to ourselves as to why we expect it. The 'uniformity of the course of

Nature' is the corner-stone, not only of physical science, but, in a more homely form, of the wisdom which grows with experience. We all believe that the sun will rise to-morrow because it rose to-day, and on all the yesterdays. But there was a to-day which had no yesterday, and there will be a to-day which will have no to-morrow. The assumption, therefore, that what is will be because it has been, is an insecure one. Directed to the crumbling world of Nature it is a dream. 'Sooner or later the sun and the stars will have annihilated all their radio-active matter, and will have burned themselves out as it were in fervent heat, and all their energy will have been dissipated in the vast emptiness of space.'¹ And applied to our own life it is even more illusory. For, if there be one thing more clearly than another written by the finger of passing Time upon our hearts it is that, as touching our duties, pleasures, failures, joys and sorrows, to-morrow will not be as to-day.

Even for those of us who may have reached the level plateau of middle life, where our position and tasks are pretty well fixed, and we have little more to expect than the monotonous repetition of the same duties recurring at the same hour every day—even for such each day has its own distinctive character. There will be so many small changes that even the same duties or enjoyments will not be quite the same, and even if the outward things remained absolutely unaltered, we who meet them are not the same. Little variations in mood and tone, diminished zest here, weakened power there, other thoughts breaking in, and over and above all the slow, silent change wrought on us by growing years, make the perfect reproduction of any past impossible.

After all, would we really desire to have to-morrow as to-day, with the same tears unshed which some of us cannot weep, the same want in our heart—the face we love still looking into ours only through dreams, the same yearning for the dear hearts afar?

2. But there is a deep sense in which the phrase is true; and out of its truth there come great comfort, deep restfulness, and never-failing strength, if only we hold fast to the unchanging love of God. To-day's wealth may be to-morrow's poverty, to-day's health to-

¹ Sir James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*.

to-morrow's sickness, to-day's happy companionship of love to-morrow's aching solitude of heart, but to-day's God will be to-morrow's God, to-day's Christ will be to-morrow's Christ. We can forecast nothing else, but we can be sure of this, that God will be with us in all the days that lie before us.

Yea, I am with thee when there falls no shadow
Across the golden glory of the day,
And I am with thee when the storm-clouds
gather,

Dimming the brightness of the onward way ;
In days of loss and loneliness and sorrow,
Of care and weariness and fretting pain,
In days of weakness and of deep depression,
Of futile effort when thy life seems vain,
When Youth has fled and Death has put far
from thee

Lover and friend who made the journey sweet,
When Age has come with slowly failing powers,
And the dark valley waits thy faltering feet,
When courage faints before the unknown future
And the heart sinks beneath its weight of
fears,

Still I am with thee, Strength and Rest and
Comfort,

Thy Counsellor through all earth's changing
years.

*Whatever goes, whatever stays,
Lo, I am with thee all the days.*¹

Such is our certain hope ; and it merges into
a very solemn vow, namely, that we shall
henceforth build our lives towards God.

3. There is a future which we can but very slightly influence, and the less we look at that the better every way. But there is also a future which we can mould as we wish—the future of our own characters, the only future which is really ours at all—and the more clearly we set it before ourselves and make up our minds as to whether we wish it to be tending, the better. The law of continuity shapes our moral and spiritual characters. What we are to-day, we shall increasingly be to-morrow. By slow, imperceptible degrees the evil grows upon us. The temptation once yielded to gains a stronger hold. The awful power of habit solidifies actions into customs.

4 ¶ 'Spanning a wild cataract in the Scottish Highlands,' writes Mr Mackintosh Mackay,

¹ Annie J. Flint, in *The Wayfarer*, May, 1923.

'there rises an old bridge, built by General Wade at the Rebellion to overawe the Highland clans. It is a massive structure such as a soldier might build ; and so high does it rise above the rocky defile that it is known in the district as "the High Bridge." Till within recent years it has been open for traffic, but now it has been pronounced unsafe. In a few years the central arch will probably fall in, and the destruction be complete. What has done it ? It is a little seed, a tiny birch-tree seed. A gust of wind caught that seed and lifted it into a fissure above the keystone of the bridge. It sank into the mouldy lime. It germinated in the winter rain. It grew into a sapling, so small at first that a child's hand could have pulled it out. But it was allowed to grow into a tree, and now digging its deep roots into the mortar, it has wrenched the solid masonry aside, so that its ultimate ruin can only be a question of time. "Sow a seed and you reap a habit ; sow a habit and you reap a character ; sow a character and you reap a destiny."'

Judas was not Judas all at once. The black thing that makes him shrink through shadows for ever, was easier of accomplishment when suspicion sat close to suspicion, and they had whispered together a while in the dark. The third denial of Peter came easier from his tongue because he had practised it twice already. But neither did John become the great Saint he was except by the daily establishment of saintly habits, by the constant companionship of thoughts of Christ.

It is in this way that most often 'to-morrow is as to-day, and more abundant.' The laughter of evil or the song of victory leaves lingering echoes in the house of life. Thus, in little things that we might easily overlook, is to-day preparing tears and shame, or beauty and love, for many a heart's to-morrow. There is such an unforeseen might in our most trivial deed and thought.

We have the great and abiding comfort of knowledge that there may be woven, day by day, and hour by hour, out of our thought and desire, such a song and such a prayer as the angels will hush their *Gloria* to listen to, as it breaks out of shadow into the presence of God, just as easily as all this pain and sadness that men weave out of selfishness and sin.

The Will to Hope

Is. lvii. 10.—'Thou wast wearied with the length of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou didst find a quickening of thy strength; therefore thou wast not faint' (R.V.).

THE context shows that the words were spoken to Israel of the time of her apostasy. They describe an attitude of wilfulness and of the unteachableness of a worldly heart. Yet at the same time, as so often in the generous breadth of the prophet's mind, they reveal a kindly feeling of honest admiration as of one who should say, Thy endurance was worthy of a better cause. 'Thou wast wearied with the length of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope, Thou didst find a quickening of thy strength.' The picture is that of one who has travelled a long road and is utterly wearied with the journey, who yet will not give up hope, and, as he definitely puts aside the thought of failure, feels his strength revive, grips his load with a firmer hand and marches on.

1. The verse is extraordinarily modern. For what it carries with it by implication is the whole system of teaching which is based upon the power of mind to control bodily life. In the margin of the Revised Version the Hebrew of the last clause, is, 'Therefore thou wast not sick.' Sickness or faintness of spirit is perhaps intended, but the health of the body is clearly involved too. Thus we touch here the principles of mental healing.

There are a good many forms which these principles have taken in our time. The most outstanding is, of course, Christian Science. Then we have in America the Emmanuel Movement—a movement connected with Protestant churches which seeks to combine bodily healing with the ordinary proclamation and teaching of Christian truth. And, again, there are in our own country, as well as elsewhere, many smaller bodies of Christians who practise faith-healing. The one thing which all these alike rest upon is the power of ideas imparted to the mind to strengthen the bodily life. The method is not new. Indeed, mental healing is probably the oldest form of the healing art. Before men knew how to gather drugs from herbs they prayed to their gods for relief, and through prayer found some gift of strength.

¶ In ancient times a great medical school was to be found on the Greek island of Cos. There, under the sanction of the altars of Greek deities, a treatment was given to sick people which combined mental with physical remedies. The uncovered ruins of this great establishment occupy a large area, stretching over a terraced hillside backed by a cypress grove, and looking out upon a splendid prospect of mountain and sea. The great pile of buildings which formed the home of the school of medicine at Cos comprised many rooms for sleeping in, ranged round the temple courts, for what was known as 'incubation,' or sleeping in a temple, was an approved remedy for sickness. But there were other rooms as well as halls devoted to the pursuit of art, and the drama, and literature, and music, where the Greek priest-doctors brought to bear upon their patients' illnesses all the influences of a well-educated mind, as well as the benefits arising from baths and drugs.

There are reserves of life in us all which we seldom draw upon. It rests very much with our will whether we are weakly or strong, and especially it depends upon this—the measure of our expectation of good. 'Thou wast wearied with the length of the way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope. Thou didst find a quickening of thy strength; therefore thou wast not sick.' That, as the prophet saw, might be true of any man. He said it, as we have seen, of those who were on a wrong course. Wrong as that course was, the law of life held good for them that, within certain limits, the spiritual elements in man can rule the physical, and the bad man who has the will to hope finds his powers revive.

2. Now if that is true as a general law of man's life, how much it means for the man who is living in obedience to God. How much more reason there is for the good man than for the bad man to refuse to say, 'There is no hope.' For if the moral bias of our life swings round insistently upon the side of right, we are in the main flow of the universe. The text, however, is for the hour when a man cannot see how the tide is flowing towards the good, when the obvious facts of life seem against him, when he is utterly tired with the long road which has no turning in it. 'Thou wast wearied with the length of thy way.' Now is the time to realize that the help God

sends is likely to be just in that long way and through its very lengthiness. If He can make us resist the temptation to hopelessness He will make us stronger men. Let us learn from our social service. If a man is sunk in poverty, it is better to give him work than to give him money. If he is ailing, we say, if we can, something like this, 'Silver and gold have I none, but . . . in the name of Jesus Christ walk.' And in like manner God will surely answer our cries of distress through us rather than through our circumstances. For God never acts through us without leaving us after the action better and abler persons than we were before.

Hope evermore and believe, O man, for e'en as thy thought

So are the things that thou see'st; e'en as thy hope and belief.

Cowardly art thou and timid? they rise to provoke thee against them,

Hast thou courage? enough, see them exulting to yield.

3. This is an attitude we owe not only to ourselves, but also to others. For how easily we change the temperature of each other's hopes and fears, with all that they mean of moral power or weakness. You will recollect Charles Dickens' story *The Haunted Man*, the story of the man who, because he could not face out and conquer his own sad memories, closed with the offer of a ghost to cancel in him the memory of sorrow, and to enable him to remove from others, too, the remembrance of grief. And you will recall how, wherever he went, the haunted man cast a shadow over people's lives, turning happy families into vexed and quarrelling ones, because he took from them the sympathy-roots out of which our best happiness springs. The truth of the story at its broadest is that we are able, wherever we go, by our own courage or cowardice to cast sunshine or shadow upon the lives of others. And sometimes the influence which passes from us is a conscious one. The Seventy-Third Psalm tells the experience of one who was greatly driven to doubt God, as he saw wickedness prospering around him. He was tempted to say,

Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart,
And washed my hands in innocency.

But he did *not* say it—

If I *had* said, I will speak thus;

Behold, I had dealt treacherously with the generation of thy children.

A Frenchman said a little time ago, 'What deserting to the enemy is in a soldier, pessimism is in the civilian.' It is treachery. In our very souls we must be loyal to each other, remembering that faith and hope and love at all times are moral powers, making for the strength and the health of the whole man, and that in times of stress, when the way is long and wearisome, the man whose life is guided by the revealed will of God must find for his own sake, and for the sake of his comrade, that the challenge of weariness becomes the occasion of the will to hope—hope that is sure and certain in the righteousness of God.

Order, courage, return;

Eyes rekindling, and prayers,

Follow your steps as ye go.

Ye fill up the gaps in our files,

Strengthen the wavering line,

Stablish, continue our march,

On, to the bound of the waste,

On, to the City of God.¹

The Heavenly Guest

Is. lvii. 15.—'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'

1. DR JOWETT, the Master of Balliol, was once addressed by a lady who believed him to be somewhat liberal and vague in his views of religion; she said, 'Sir, can you tell us what you really think about God?' The answer was: 'Madam, it matters very little what I think about God, but it matters a great deal what God thinks about me.' Yet beneath that assertion there was another which you can distinguish at once, namely: It matters very much what I think God thinks of me. It is essential that I should have right views of that Divine nature which is every hour appealing to mine,

¹ Matthew Arnold.

the one unescapable reality of my life, without which one can neither think, nor speak, nor act. Every man must positively or negatively define his attitude to God.

'Whose name is holy.' That is the primary content in the character of God. But at the present day we tend to emphasize His love and forget His holiness. There can be no love without holiness; holiness is love's most secret heart. By the introduction of uncleanness love is fatally stricken. It was to God's holiness that our Lord gave first place when He addressed His Father in heaven. 'Holy Father!' If we realized this as the first characteristic of God it would make an enormous difference in our mode of approach. We should not think so much about our words as about the lips that utter them; not so much about our gifts as about the hands that present them; not so much about our ritual as about the hearts that use it. If our minds were set upon the holiness of God, our first and last supplication would be this: 'Create within me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.'

2. One reason why it is essential to have right views of God is because human excellence is rather a Divine impulse than a set of rules. Israel made the mistake of reversing those two sets of ideas. None of us can claim any goodness at all. It is, as it were, drawn out of us by the impulse of devotion to a person. That is true in small things as well as great. Every child has his ideal and his hero. Young men unconsciously select the type of character which they wish to make their own, embody it in a person, and then give a certain devotion to that person, either for good or for ill to their own nature. We read in George Eliot of a character who was saved by devotion to the sweet innocence of a little child. Silas Marner was a miser, somebody came and took away his hoard, and this poor, misanthropic, lonely man, who had been wronged by his fellow-creatures and who repudiated them with bitterness, was redeemed from his life of sordidness and bitterness and anguish of spirit by the sweet innocence of a little child that was left on his hearthrug. His life of devotion to her had something in it akin to reverence; he revered the sweetness and the innocence which, though it be not the highest form of goodness, yet blends with it, and he was saved

by that. This, again, is Jesus' method. Our Master was His own Gospel. Men came to Him one by one attracted by His winsomeness. He spake, of course, as never man spake, and He was as never man was, and, as has been well said, He reversed our ordinary experience about our human ideals. The nearer we draw to an individual, as a rule, the more plainly we see the flaws and the crevices in his character; but the nearer we draw to Jesus the more His faultless excellence declares itself. They were drawn to Him, they hardly knew why, with a reverence and a devotion unexampled in the history of the world. He sums up for us everything that is good, and instead of thinking about rules of service we think about Him, and then we are compelled towards the goodness which is a spirit rather than a code. The moment we form our conception of God from what we think about Jesus, a Divine impulse is communicated to character, men rise above rules and sets of rules, above ritual and observance, above such conditions as the Jews set themselves, and the prophetic voice speaks not without but within our hearts, when it says, 'Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy'—so holy that we cannot approach it—'I dwell in the high and holy place with him also,' as Jesus did, 'that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' When we think about these things we begin to understand what it is that God expects from us in the service and devotion of the heart.

3. Does it not sometimes seem as though our first acquaintance with such an ideal as is here presented repels rather than attracts us towards excellence of character and of life? In the days when Jesus came preaching, men gathered to Him at first with an enthusiasm for an ideal which by-and-by dissipated itself. The effect of Jesus upon some of those who knew Him best was to cause fear and awe. In one hour of wonder, when the apostle Peter, who had given himself as he thought body and soul to the Master's service, was surprised by the sudden vision of His greatness, the impulse of his nature was to fling himself down before Christ, and say, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' The ideal of service within his own heart was chilled by the thought

of its impossibility when he came near to the holiness of Christ. And it is so even now. As we fall into sin, blunder succeeding blunder, failure following failure, we think how remote that holy life is, how impossible it is that we can be holy too.

¶ Like the medieval statue of which legend averred that it was always taller than the tallest man who stood before it, Christ surpasses me habitually and infinitely. The nearer I come to Him, the farther He seems to recede. Of his mother an American singer writes, 'I read her face as one who reads a true and holy book'; and thus I read the supreme Face of Jesus, and acknowledge my inferiority, and cry, *I am a sinful man, O Lord*.¹

4. That brings us close to the message of the text, and it is the message of Jesus. 'With him also.' It is true that Jesus is the high and lofty One, but He dwells with him also who is not good and knows that he is not good; with him also who has failed in life and knows that he has failed; with him also who has come down so low in his own esteem that he can get no lower—with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, abides our Master; not simply to sympathize, but to save, to revive the heart of the contrite one. This is the great message of Christianity to the world. It is a message of hope to every heart. As soon as we have discovered our own failure and unworthiness we have discovered the Spirit of Christ, who abides with those who need Him most and are conscious of that need. High and lifted up, indeed, He dwells with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.

How wonderful it is to think of it! The Lord of the universe, the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity, stood amongst men as the lowly One, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister—the truth which seems so impossible for the mind to grasp, but which countless hearts have grasped ere now, that Jesus, who was before all things, came as a suffering Saviour unto His own, yet was rejected by His own. Think of it, the Lord of the universe hanging on a cross, agonized, rejected of men; the suffering Messiah giving Himself for the sins of men, dwelling 'with him also'—each one of us who is of a contrite and humble spirit, and has discovered his need of the

¹ A. Smellie.

forgiveness of God. This is the very essence of the gospel.

The Heaven of Heavens cannot contain
The Universal Lord;
Yet He, in humble hearts, will deign
To dwell, and be adored.

Where'er ascends the sacrifice
Of fervent praise and prayer.
Or on the earth, or in the skies,
The Heaven of God is there.

His presence there is spread abroad,
Through realms, through worlds unknown;
Who seeks the mercies of his God,
Is ever near His throne.

Fasting for Others

Is. lviii. 6, 7.—'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?'

ST GREGORY the Great says: 'Fasting consists not merely in strict abstinence from lawful food, but in entire separation from sinful practices, and in the hearty doing of right things. If thou seest an enemy, be reconciled to him; if thou seest a poor man, take pity on him; if thou seest a neighbour prospering, thank God for him.' St Chrysostom teaches practically the same truth. 'If,' he declares, 'one says to thee, "I have fasted all through Lent," say thou, "I had an enemy, but I am reconciled to him; I had a bad habit, but I have left it off; I had an ungodly custom of speaking, but it is amended."'

1. *The Purpose of Fasting*.—From these extracts it is clear that in the early days of the Church, fasting was looked upon as something which must deal with the whole round of life, and not merely with one particular part, such as abstinence from food. If we are to fast in such a way that spiritual good is to result, we must take care that the purpose of fasting is clear. Its real purpose is that we may become unselfish. We must see to it,

then, that our aim is something that carries us right away from self; that we fast not merely for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others; otherwise our very fasting may become a species of selfishness which works hurt rather than profit to the soul.

There may be a thought in some men's minds that to withdraw from the world, as in the monastic system, is to get into closer union with God. But that is a false idea of the Christian life, as the example of our Saviour clearly shows. *He* did not shut Himself off from the world; *He* lived in the world, and *He* was its Light. As *He* was so we, His disciples, should seek to be. We must follow His example, and then we shall realize the great ideal so well expressed in the prayer of Faber:

O Lord! that I could waste my life for others,
With no ends of my own,
That I could pour myself into my brothers,
And live for them alone!

2. *Fasting as Abstinence.*—In considering this subject of fasting for others, let us be clear that true fasting implies, must imply, abstinence. As St Basil says: 'The true fast is estrangement from evil.' It surely implies the giving up of any thing which may hinder us in the main business of life, which is that we may be fit for God's use, fit to be His instruments. The Christian must not abstain from this or from that with any thought of self, but that the purpose of his Master concerning him may be fulfilled.

'If meat make my brother to offend, then I will eat no more flesh,' says St Paul, 'while the world standeth.' This is the language of one who must have entered deeply into the Spirit of his Master. A thing may be perfectly innocent, but we must forgo its use if it causes a brother to stumble. Take, for instance, the question of strong drink. It is possible, no doubt, for a man to drink so moderately that he suffers no injury. But the Christian is not to look at the matter from that point of view; he is bound to look at it as it concerns his brethren. The greatest Temperance workers have invariably been themselves total abstainers. We cannot think of a moderate drinker being able to persuade large numbers of men to give up drink. The successful Temperance advocate is invariably the man

who is willing to put on one side that which he might take without injury to himself in order that the other man may have the benefit of his example; and God honours and uses such men. The rule of life for the Christian is not simply, Is it right? but, How will it affect my neighbour? In his own personal attitude towards pleasure, or towards recreation, he is bound to remember that if he does that which, however innocent in itself, causes his neighbour to offend, he sins against Christ. The Christian, then, must fast for others, not simply because it is Lent, not simply that he may grow in grace, but in order that his brother, weaker than himself, may be encouraged to stand.

3. *Fasting as a Principle of Action.*—Fasting, however, does not mean abstinence alone: it may be regarded as a principle of action. Here is an extract from the *Apology* of Aristides. Describing the lives of the early Christians, he says: 'They abstained from impurity in the hope of the recompense that is to come in another world. . . . As for their servants or handmaids or their children, if they have any, they persuade them to become Christians for the love that they have towards them; and when they have become so, they call them, without distinction, brethren. They do not worship strange gods; and they walk in all humility and kindness; and falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another. From the widows they do not turn away their countenance; they rescue the orphan from him who does him violence; he who has gives to him who has not, without grudging. When they see a stranger they bring him to their dwellings, and rejoice over him as over a true brother; for they do not call brothers those who are after the flesh, but those who are in the Spirit and in God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial, according to his ability; and if they hear any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his need; and if it be possible that he may be delivered they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and if they have not abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with the necessary food.'

Are there any Christians of that type to-day?

Are there any of us who would willingly fast two or three days that others might have the necessities of life? And yet that was the general character of those early Christians—they fasted for others. So we see that we must fast not merely in order that we may remove a stumbling-block from others, but also that we may help them in various other ways.

We can help them by cultivating the virtues which will make us greater and more powerful instruments of God for good in the world. The true Christian life is not built up without much labour and great self-denial. No scholar becomes such without hard work, without self-denial; so also the Christian who wants to be of use to others must exercise self-denial by applying to himself the great principles which go to build up character, and which alone can make him strong in the service of God and man. He will pray not simply that he himself may gather grace, but that he may get from God that which will enable him to be more useful to others. He will read the Bible not simply to get from it the consolation which it gives, but that he may be built up in those very things which will make him a stronger instrument for God in the world. He will come to church, to the Lord's Table, not simply that he may gather strength and comfort for his own soul, but that, by getting a stronger grasp of Jesus Christ, he may go out to save the lost. Goldsmith's ideal clergyman who 'lured to brighter worlds and led the way' is an example not merely for the clergy, but for the laity as well. The Christian will strive, not merely to be upright, but also to be beautiful in character. Napoleon once said, and said truly: 'To conquer, you must replace.' What did he mean? It is not sufficient merely to work on the negative principle—'Thou shalt not'; it is not sufficient to denounce; rather must we go forth manifesting in our lives something more beautiful, and commending by our example that which brings greater peace, greater joy, and greater usefulness than anything which men of the world can obtain elsewhere.

¶ A man of the world, expecting to be unattracted, found that spiritual goodness in Gore was 'the most attractive thing in the world.' 'When I meet Gore'—and he had known him since the 'nineties—'as always I feel that I am with someone whose life has been lived on a plane altogether higher than

my own. And this does not repel but attracts. I know quite well that I can see it in Jesus of Nazareth, and I know quite well that though I have it in my head it has never got right hold of the rest of me. And I know that it has got right hold of Gore. He can put it with eloquence and simplicity, but he puts it not only as something he knows but as something that he is.'¹

4. *Self-denial for Christ's sake.*—For His sake 'who,' as the Lenten collect puts it, 'for *our sake* didst fast forty days and forty nights.' Let us go forth into the world 'using such abstinence' that our lives may be beautified by the Holy Spirit, and that we may be quite willing to undertake any work God may give us to do. We are not expected to pick and choose in Christian work as a man takes up cricket because he prefers it to golf, or golf because he prefers it to tennis. A soldier does not take up some particular work because he likes it, but because he is told to do it whether he likes it or not. The commander has given him the order, and that order must be obeyed.

In such ways fasting may be made to touch the whole round of daily life. It is not right to say, 'I must look after myself and others can do the same.' No, the Christian's attitude must be that of the swimmer who, seeing a little child, or a woman, or a man in danger of drowning, goes to the rescue. What would we say of such a man if, being a strong swimmer himself, he left another to perish without an effort to bring him ashore? So the Christian must not live for himself; and the motive power of all such self-denial is the love of Christ. It is true that ancient philosophers such as Aristotle spoke of the life of self-denial, but it was empty talk; there was no power behind it. As Lecky tells us in his historical survey of those days, it is only since Christianity appeared, only since men have had the grand and noble example of Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit has come into men, that they have really learnt how to carry out that which some of the old philosophers taught, and have been enabled, like Ignatius, to say: 'My love is crucified.' He meant his love of the world, his love of things around him. Why was it crucified? Because he himself was centred in Christ. Christ had killed his love of the world,

¹ G. L. Prestige, *The Life of Charles Gore*, 536.

and had replaced it by His own: and Christ's love made him love his fellows.

Let us grow like our own ideals, and do
The good which we have dreamed of hitherto;
Or, if to things so high we may not reach,
Lest we should miss the lesson God would teach,
Let us forget our dreams and, day by day,
Take up the common tasks about our way,
And in these learn the secret of His will.
We must not waste the golden hours, until
Some nobler, greater task shall claim our care.
He sends us forth a daily cross to bear—
Sad hearts to comfort—lonely lives to bless—
To help the widow, and the fatherless—
To bring the outcast to our home, and feed
The hungry poor who at our threshold plead.

So shall the Christ-like life be ours, and so,
Unconsciously, our human lives shall grow
Into the likeness of the life divine,
And in the brightness of His glory shine.¹

Repairer and Restorer

Is. lviii. 12.—'And thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.'

WHAT the prophet is saying here is that the returned exiles, provided they fulfilled certain conditions—and the conditions were that they should be truly God's people and that their religion should reveal itself in life—should be able to rebuild the old wastes, to re-erect their ruined and shattered cities, and to reconstruct their broken civilization, so that this returned Israel would gain the titles, 'The repairer of the breach; the restorer of paths to dwell in.'

Now the New Testament counterpart of Israel is the Christian Church. And what we find in the text is a suggestion as to the office and function of the Church in the world—it is to be the Repairer and the Restorer.

1. *The Repairer of the Breach.*—This title sets forth one aspect of the Church's function and business. Our world is a broken world. There are 'breaches' in all directions, and they are serious and deep. We are all of us sensible of them. We are alive to the danger of them.

¹ Edith H. Divall.

We realize that, unless these 'breaches' are healed, there may be an end to civilization altogether. Now the Church is set in the world for the 'repair' of these 'breaches,' and in its gospel it has the power to accomplish it. This is not to disparage the efforts which statesmen and social reformers are directing to the same end. But the final cure is not with them. The final cure is with the Church and its gospel, which can create clean hearts in men and renew right spirits within them. Let us think of some of these broken places which call aloud for repair.

(1) There is the breach *between man and God*. This breach does not come within the cognizance of statesmen and reformers. In the nature of things it cannot. Laws and regulations deal with external behaviour, they do not deal with disposition. And yet, inasmuch as behaviour follows disposition, it would seem that legislation must in the long run fail unless man is set right in the innermost recesses of his soul. Now it is just there that man is wrong. There is a 'breach' between man and God. We read in the old story of man's creation—and, whatever we may think of the *form* of the story, it is essentially and eternally true—that God made man in His own image; which means that God made man capable of holding fellowship with Himself and designed him for such fellowship. It was in that fellowship man was meant to find his true happiness. But man was alienated from God by his own sins. The 'breach' has been age-long, and the result has been the loss of happiness and peace.

The Church, with its gospel, is set in the world to heal this fundamental breach and to bring God and man together. The word which has been committed to us to preach is the 'word of reconciliation'; the gospel entrusted to us is the great gospel of atonement—at-one-ment. We have to proclaim to men that sin, the great obstacle to reconciliation, has been taken away by a supreme sacrifice on the part of God Himself. And as we preach that gospel with conviction and with passion, and bring it home to the hearts of men, the Church will deserve this title, 'The Repairer of the breach.'

The great world's heart is aching,
Aching fiercely in the night,
And God alone can heal it
And God alone give light.

And the men who bear the message
And who speak that living word
Are you and I, my brothers,
And the many who have heard.

(2) There is also the breach that has been made *between nation and nation*. The world is in danger from it just now. The suspicions and hatreds which divided the nations brought upon us the tragedy of the Great War. They seem likely to land us in catastrophes more terrible yet, unless they are speedily healed. The League of Nations is our human method for trying to heal the breach. We all pray for its success. But the true Repairer of this terrible breach is the Church of Jesus Christ, and that for at least a double reason.

The first is that the Church itself is an *international society*. It takes no notice of geographical boundaries or racial distinctions. It is composed of all who in every place love the Lord Jesus Christ and serve Him. The world to-day is suffering from an exaggerated and over-emphasized nationalism. The cure for that is to find some *internationalism* in which all these competing nationalisms may find a higher unity, and that internationalism which is to transcend all local and petty nationalisms is the internationalism of the Christian Church. The internationalism of Labour will not do it, for it is itself partial and divisive. But the internationalism of the Church will do it.

And the second reason is this: that the law of that international society is the *law of love*. 'Love the brotherhood,' says the Apostle. We talk about the brotherhood of man, but the brotherhood of the Christian Church is a much more vital and real thing. Once Christian people in every land learned to love one another, the divisions of the world would be largely healed. It is not by new treaties and agreements we are going to bring in the peaceful years, but by a change of spirit.

(3) Then there is the breach that exists *between class and class*. It is not only the unity of the world which has been broken; the unity of individual nations has been broken too. Our own English society is seamed and rent by division, and the divisions are often accompanied by rancour and hatred. Governments can do something by way of removing glaring injustices and insisting upon a minimum of fair play. But the root trouble is one of spirit and

temper. Here is our land divided into classes that are suspicious of one another, and regard one another as antagonists and foes. Now, it matters not what arrangements Governments may make, there will always be trouble so long as that spirit remains. And for a change of spirit is there any way save the way of Christ? Is there any way of really healing our social hurt, and knitting together our various classes into one, save this: that everyone should look upon his task in life, whatever it be, as his opportunity of serving both God and his fellows; that he should regard it, not as a means of self-aggrandisement, but as a ministry? Shall we ever be really united until we learn to serve one another in love? That is exactly what the prophet says here. If Israel wants to be known as the Repairer of the breach, the people must loose the bonds of wickedness, and undo the bands of the yoke, and let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke, and deal their bread to the hungry and bring the poor into their house. They are themselves to do justly and to love mercy—so, and so only, would they be able to build up their land into a happy commonwealth.

¶ Frank Crossley wrote to his wife, before they were married: 'If my business, which has good possibilities about it, did become lucrative, I would never, if I continue to hold my present views, think it right to live in such a way as conventional morality pronounces in favour of. There is too much wretchedness in the world, in my opinion, to warrant any useless or unnecessary expenditure. Until the poor, who have always been with us so far, have departed or become well-to-do, the principle, I take it, ought to be: Spend on yourself that only which will enable you to contribute to the well-being of others in the greatest degree.'

¶ We are told of the Duke of Guise that on one occasion, when his funds were low, the steward of his household advised the dismissal of a number of servants, on the plea that he had no need of them. 'But are you sure,' answered the Duke, 'that they have no need of me?'

2. *The Restorer of Paths*.—Safe roads are an indispensable condition of a nation's life. No nation can live without the means of inter-communication. So, in the prophet's vision of the Return, he sees Israel busy at the task of

restoring the neglected and disused roads, making travel easy and safe. Israel was to be called 'the Restorer of paths to dwell in.'

These days of ours are, from the moral point of view, confused and troubled. It is very easy for a man to lose his bearings. The right path may quite easily be missed, for one hears a number of competing voices crying out, 'This is the way.' A whole crop of new cults have appeared, all offering an easier way than the Christian. And, more dangerous still, the new psychology, with its stress upon instinct and appetite, has become in the hands of unscrupulous men an excuse for licentious living. They instil that poison into the minds of men through the pages of our modern fiction. In these days of loosened moral restraints and a sort of revived paganism it is ours to clear away the fogs of mist and doubt and set the old way—the way that has a Cross on it—plain and patent before men's gaze, so that wayfaring men need not err therein.

And if there are some who are always trying to confuse men's minds as to which the right road is, there are others who are always trying to break it up, trying to make it difficult for men to travel it. Enemy guns were constantly doing that in France—trying to smash up the roads to prevent supplies either of food or ammunition reaching the men in the trenches. Every young person issuing forth from home comes in contact with the roadbreaker, the man who puts an occasion to fall in his brother's way. And it is our business to counteract the work of these men—to be repairers of the road, so that men may travel easily along it. By surrounding young people, for instance, with our sympathy and affection and prayers, by befriending them in their loneliness, we must try to make it easier for them to live pure, speak true, and follow the Christ, the King. The Church must be the 'restorer of paths to dwell in.'

¶ Michael Fairless opens her best-known book with the words, 'I have attained my ideal; I am a roadmender.' It is the Christian ideal. It is what every Christian ought to aspire to be. The road has been made long since. Jesus made it. It is ours to keep it in repair, to make it as easy as may be for the traveller. That is what the undergraduates of Cambridge said about the beloved Clerk Maxwell: 'He made it easy to be good.'

¶ ¶ When the natives of Samoa cast about for some way of showing their gratitude to R. L. Stevenson for his kindness to them, they decided to build a road from his house to the village. Nothing could have been more symbolic of friendship than this removal of obstacles from the path by which he and they could come together. They were smoothing the way of fellowship. They called the new way the 'Road of the Loving Heart.' While they were at it, a ship's captain, who was visiting the island, asked what they were doing. When they told him, his imagination was touched, and he took off his coat saying, 'I'd like to take a hand in this job.'

'The Lord's Day

Is. lviii. 13.—'If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words. . . .'

THE whole of this chapter is filled with the protest of a great-souled prophet against formalism, mere ritualism; and yet he picks out the Sabbath for special emphasis and observance. The central thought is the delight of the soul in Jehovah, of a pure spiritual communion independent of ordinance and fasting and observance; and yet we suddenly find insistence upon one special piece of ritualism taken as the type of what is necessary for delight in God. Why this special exception? Why does he desire the observance of the Sabbath?

1. We recall how our Lord resented the degradation into a bondage of what was meant to be a freedom. The Sabbath was made for man; the rabbis had so interpreted it that they had made it a slavery, and thus destroyed its true meaning. It is the great charter of the freedom of the workers, the solace of the toilers, the healing of the weary. It seemed as though the observance was dependent on and intertwined with the very structure and ritual of the Temple, yet when the Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar the principle survived, and the captive nation learned afresh its beauty. The fanatic and unspiritual literalism of the Scribes

made the Jewish Sabbath a slavery ; but when the city was ravaged by the Roman soldiers and the nation was ruined, the sacred inner fact remained and expressed itself in the Christian Lord's Day. The particular day was changed, but the principle and the fact and the period remained ; and on all there shone the Light of Life that came from the shattered tomb where the God-Man had conquered sin and death. The principle of the Sabbath is eternally true ; no summary of God's commandments could possibly be without it, even though the method of expression might be temporary.

Hence it is, though at first we might not expect it, that we find this command of a form in the midst of a chapter which warns of the danger of forms. The observance of the Sabbath is selected as the type of the acknowledgment of God in life. If God is to be acknowledged, there must be some amount of definite and regular devotion to Him. No detail is fixed ; the spirit giveth life. When the New Testament Apostle writes his description of that service which is perfect freedom, 'Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price,' he is simply interpreting, in the light of the Cross and its redeeming power, the utterance of the Old Testament prophet—not thine own ways, not thine own pleasure, not thine own words, but Mine, My holy day, a delight, honourable.

2. The separation of one day in seven for that rest of the whole being necessitates that the soul of man should in its occupations come into touch with the occupations of God. The coming of the soul on that day into its true atmosphere of the presence of God means that there must be worship, the sanctifying of time and place and thought, the expression of praise and joy, the pouring forth of prayer and the meditation on the utterances of God. The earliest description of Christians that we have from an outsider selects this action as characteristic. Pliny tells his master that they abstain from impurity and idolatry and meet early on the first day of the week, singing hymns to Christ as God.

It is true that God may be found anywhere, but we must begin by finding Him somewhere. We may worship Him in the open, but the Sanctuary is the Altar, by the neglect of which a man makes public profession of his indiffer-

ence to God, who has the first claim upon his homage and his service. Public worship, the assembling of ourselves together on the Lord's Day, is due to Jesus Christ as a solemn public act, in which we do Him honour, own His name, and acknowledge His rule.

¶ 'Late one Sunday afternoon,' writes Canon Peter Green, 'I was coming back from a preaching engagement, and was thinking of my evening sermon, when suddenly the only other person in the tram, a young man with golf clubs, leant forward and said to me : "I suppose you think me very wicked for playing golf on Sunday ?" I replied : "As a matter of fact, I was not thinking about you at all. But I suppose from your remark that your own conscience troubles you ?" "Not at all," he replied, "I find I get more good from a day out in the fresh air than I ever got in a stuffy church." "Exactly," I replied, "and when you leave off thinking only of yourself and begin to think of God, you will be in a better position to judge of the duty of Sunday worship. If someone reproached you for neglecting your father, would you say it did you more good to enjoy yourself than to waste time talking to an old man ?"'

Worship is rightly regarded as a duty towards God. But it has also a reflex effect upon ourselves. It is the highest and the most effective form of rest. In worship we ascend in heart and mind to the heavenly places. There we are surrounded by a silence in which the confused clamours of our daily work die down, and we attain essential peace. This is a truth of experience which is not confined to mystics and very pious people but is shared by ordinary faithful worshippers. Thus the Christian claim for worship, as for themselves the first requisite in the ordering of Sunday, goes to the heart of their conception of a day of rest.

¶ A great deal of the depression and 'nerviness' and restlessness, and indeed of other forms of ill-health, so prevalent to-day, is due at bottom, though the cause often remains undiagnosed, to sheer spiritual starvation. What the man really needs is, not a motor trip to the seaside, but God ; not an afternoon of bridge, but an opportunity to repossess his soul and get the deepest springs of his being cleansed and renewed. And there to his hand, if only he realized it, tranquil, comforting, accessible, is this weekly oasis, where he may refresh his soul with what Keats calls

This fountain of immortal drink
Pouring into us from the heaven's brink.¹

3. All our time is God's, but it is good for us to recognize that fact by a public staking off of one portion of it as specially His. There is advantage in giving up ordinary work, in having quite a different programme for Sunday. The six weekdays have had their work and their recreation, each bringing its own pleasure. Shall we play, then, on the Lord's Day? The old prophet said, 'Not finding thine own pleasure.' It is sometimes forgotten that, if the day be given to pleasure, no valid reason can be urged against its being given to either work or trading. It is quite true, of course, that the necessity for physical rest and recuperation remains, but the spiritual sanctities of the day are not inconsistent with these. If, however, man seeks recreation on the Lord's Day, obviously it must satisfy a twofold condition—first, that it is consistent with the religious character of the day, and, so far as the individual is concerned, must neither impair his spiritual well-being nor bring dishonour upon his Lord. On the other hand, his use of the day must not make for the selfish subservience of his fellow-man to his own pleasure, or rob him of his sacred rights in the faith. Our use of the day must not offend the first law of the faith in disregard to our brother.

It is obvious, then, that the Christian conscience must exercise the utmost caution towards every form of pleasure or entertainment—pictorial, musical, or otherwise—which detracts from the primary spiritual character of the day. It ought to be subjected to the severest scrutiny. Possibly the Church itself errs in failure to urge the simple and direct solemnization of the day. It may be that both office-bearers and people need to be recalled to a sense of its spiritual character.²

The true Lord's Day that makes God's pleasure ours leads to our delight in Him, refreshes our souls, braces our minds, sends us on our way to a week in which the habit of the Lord's Day makes beautiful each service and lightens each toil.

God the Bridge-Builder

Is. lix. 2.—'But your iniquities have separated between you and your God.'

1. THE prophet is telling his people that their loss of touch with God is due to sin. He is thinking of national unrighteousness rather than of individual sin. It was only perhaps Jeremiah who could sound that deeper personal note and touch the personal conscience. But to-day we are in a peculiarly favourable position for appreciating this prophet's reference. For it is social rather than individual unrighteousness of which we are specially conscious.

He charges the Jews with neglect of the spirit of the Sabbath—not inappropriate in our own time when Sunday seems to be a day consecrated to all the idols rather than to the Lord our God. And, further, he charges the Jews with the oppression of the poor, with the exploitation of their fellows, with the sins of the tongue, with crooked ways. We recognize them all as our sins. We know that we are our brother's keeper, and have, therefore, our share of the responsibility for the sins of the community—the vice, the drunkenness, the spread of carelessness. We can never feel very comfortable when we hear ourselves spoken of as a Christian nation. If we were a Christian nation we know that our social unrighteousness could not be. If even the Christians were Christians these things would not be. And these things inevitably destroy our peace. They are our sins, and spoil our relationship with God.

But presently the prophet shows another side of the picture. He has said that God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. He goes on to say that God's heart is not hardened that He will not save. The separation due to sin God will not allow to be final. He will insist on being friends. His love will not let us go.

How wonderful the Jews were in their persistent hopefulness! They felt that no separation could really be complete and final. In all the crises of their history we find the same optimism—a Redeemer will come. However black things seem, they go on hoping. Again God will be their God, and they will be His people. However grievously they have offended, when they come to themselves God will turn upon them the light of His countenance, and the separation will be ended and peace restored.

¹ E. S. Woods, *A Faith that Works*, 188.

² J. Hall, *Workaday Ethics*, 157.

2. Long ago the head of the Roman religion was called Pontifex Maximus. In the days of the Empire the title passed to the Emperor. Even the nominally Christian Emperor Constantine was Pontifex Maximus. After the Western Empire collapsed the title came to be assumed by the Pope. It is still a title he claims. Scholars are not very sure how the name arose or what it was originally intended to convey. But perhaps we may be content to say that it seems to mean the Chief Bridge-builder.

The word 'bridge' is never once mentioned in the Bible. Bridges were little needed in a country where the natural and comfortable mode of travel is to go on foot or ride a donkey. But if the Jews had not much experience of ordinary bridges they thoroughly appreciated the bridging of less material chasms, and to them God was great, just because, in their experience, He acted, we might say, as Pontifex Maximus—no separation would He allow to be entirely final. However wide the gulf, God, they were certain, could and would make a way over.

There were directions in which the Jews were slow to apply this deduction from their national experience. Indeed, the greatness of their contribution to world religion was, in some measure, due to their exclusiveness, the jealousy with which they maintained the separation between themselves and the Gentiles. But they certainly had glimpses of God the Bridge-Builder—glimpses that became sight in Christ. Isaiah had dreams of the brotherhood of nations and also of true Monotheism when he declared: 'In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria—in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria . . . whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.' It is quite true that Monotheism and the brotherhood of man are closely connected ideas that might not now be so clear as they are had it not been for the work of Alexander the Great, but there you have them before his time in Isaiah—dreams that came true in Christ, who has made all one and broken down the middle wall of partition, so that those that sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ our peace.

And we find the Jews at least conscious, too, of the problem of the separation between God and man. God is High and Holy, and they are people of unclean lips. And so the writer of the Book of Job longs for a daysman between him and God—a mediator who could help him and God to understand one another—a longing also realized in Christ, who came to show that in all our afflictions God is Himself afflicted. So also in this passage the prophet tells the people that sin has certainly separated them from God, but that quite as certainly a Redeemer will come that this separation may be done away. And St Paul tells us that, now that the Redeemer has come, nothing, neither life nor death, neither height nor depth—nothing can separate us from God. There is no gulf God cannot bridge.

3. Think of some of the gulfs that seem to come between even now, and think to what an extent it is sin that separates.

There are *the divisions in the Church*. As early as the second century after Christ, Celsus, that acute heathen critic of the Church, mocked at its factions and sects. To which of them all was one to go to be saved? In the fifth century one finds one sect calling a bishop of another sect 'a second Judas,' and 'an offshoot of Pharaoh'; one finds the Monophysites calling the Nestorians 'children of the Devil,' and the Nestorians returning the compliment. We hear ironically repeated from age to age the words Tertullian wrote so seriously: 'Look how these Christians love one another.' It is natural that feelings about religion should be intense, for it is a thing that matters so much, but a great deal of sin enters into sectarianism, mostly arising from the sin of ignorance, mostly due to misunderstanding. We have come to realize that sects in religion are perhaps as natural a result of our civilization as is specialization in trades or in studies. Uniformity is thoroughly impracticable in an age which sets itself to encourage individuality. Uniformity is out of the question, but brotherliness is not, and brotherly intercourse would do away with a great deal of misunderstanding, and so destroy suspicion and envy and pride. The spirit of Christ is perfectly able to bridge the gulfs that separate us, and to provide us with something of that strong unity in difference which is characteristic of every highly developed organism.

¶ Dr Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, in a sermon preached at his enthronement in Canterbury Cathedral said: 'Three main movements of thought and experience are lodged within our household—catholic, evangelical, liberal; so we call them. Is any one of them an intruder? Does not each stand for a spirit, an aspect of truth without which the Church would be impoverished and its power to answer God's call would be hindered? Then why should they contend with one another? Let each not only tolerate the others but learn from them and give its own witness, so that the fellowship of the one family of God be not broken or even strained, but made more rich and true.'

The same applies to the *separation of class from class* which is an outstanding feature of our time. If only we knew one another! Then we should find it easier to apply Christ's teaching of brotherhood, which, while by no means annihilating differences, would effectively bridge the gulf and end the sin. It will apply also to international jealousies and rivalries. As one looks at all those separations it is clear that the only possible bridges over the world's gulfs to-day are Christian bridges. One realizes how largely the separations are due to want of Christ and the Christian spirit of brotherhood.

¶ One of the memorable glimpses that we get of John Bunyan is Bunyan preaching his farewell sermon in Whitechapel in the year in which he died, 1688. Exceeding frail and ill, the love which he had for the Saviour and all men burned in his veins like fire to the end. 'Dost thou see a soul,' he pleaded, 'that has the image of God in him? Love him. Love him. Say to thyself, This man and I must go to heaven together some day. Serve one another. Do good to one another, and if any wrong you, pray God to right you, and love the brotherhood.' The words of the dying Bunyan may well serve as a motto for every man and every woman of us in these troubled times, and the spirit and the practice of them give healing to many sore and angry hearts. Build thy bridge and win thy brother.¹

The greatest separation of all is, of course, that of which we are so little conscious to-day—the *separation which sin makes between the individual soul and God*. Some say there is no sense of individual sin to-day. Certainly there is not enough. We are glad to be done with

spiritual hypochondria, which is probably all that Matthew Arnold meant to attack. We feel there is something morbid about much of the soul searching of a saint like Thomas Boston in eighteenth-century Scotland. But we must feel at the same time that our great want of a sense of personal sin means that we have not a sufficient sense of righteousness, of the beauty of God. If we knew Him as we surely ought to know Him we should have a painful sense of sin and of separation—like Isaiah in the sixth chapter of the prophecies, like St Paul. If we saw what He was like we should know what we are like, and should have a painful sense of infirmity. Painful, but on the other hand not hopeless; for if we know God as we can know Him in Jesus Christ then we know also that not even sin can separate us from Him. We are persuaded that nothing can separate us from His love. 'Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' the Redeemer, the Mediator, the Saviour.

Reflecting the Light

Is. lx. 1.—'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

A CITY in darkness, and then the same city sparkling in the rays of the early sun, reflecting from its buildings the radiance of the sunlight—that is the picture with which the writer begins this wonderful chapter. He speaks to Jerusalem. He tells her that her long night of gloom is over. Jerusalem must arise and shine, rejoicing in God her Redeemer, who has brought her out of darkness into His marvellous light. Has she not cause to be glad, since the glory of the Lord has risen upon her?

1. This prophecy probably belongs to the period when the nation, or some part of it, had come back to Palestine. They were faced with a difficult task. They had to rebuild the national life; their enemies were active; they were few in number; they were poor; there were many faint hearts among them; and we can almost hear them saying, 'Will Jerusalem ever be the royal city again? Were we not better off in the land of Babylon?' And then, as they did so despair or grumble, there bursts upon their ears this glad music from the prophet,

¹ A Maclean, *High Country*, 79.

who spoke as God's messenger, one who had the insight into God's purpose. 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' And if the light had not actually come, it was trembling on the horizon; the mountain-tops were catching the splendour of it, and in a very little while the glory would yet burst upon Jerusalem, and she would arise and shine as a city redeemed by God who was working out His purpose of redemption. Jerusalem was to have her Epiphany. The glory of the Lord would shine upon her, and she in her turn would reflect that glory, sending out her light upon the nations round about; and the light would never grow dim, for it was God's light springing from the inexhaustible depths of His love. 'The Lord shall be thy everlasting light.'

And did the prophecy come true? In part it did, and in part it did not, and it was not God's fault that part of it was not fulfilled. Let us take first the part that was fulfilled. 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come.' We pass down the centuries, and we find three wise men journeying by the light of a star to find the Babe; they bring Him their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh; they worship Him, and they go away with gladness in their hearts. That Babe was the Light of the world. Later on, when He was a man, He said of Himself, 'I am the light of the world, I am come that they might have life.' Life and light—He brought them both to men. 'The glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' It rose upon Jerusalem when Jesus was born, and when He taught in the streets of the city. And though darkness covered the city when He hung upon the Cross, the sun shone out on Easter Day, and He proved Himself the Conqueror, and brought life and immortality to light.

Here is the part of the prophecy which was not fulfilled: Jerusalem would not accept the light; she rejected the Christ; she did not become the messenger of God's truth to the nations. That was not God's fault. God leaves us free to accept or reject His offers. It is the great tragedy of Jerusalem that she crucified her Saviour, and that her eyes were blinded to the Light of the world.

2. Let us take the words as spoken directly to us, putting ourselves in the place of Jerusalem. Let us hear God saying to each one of

us, 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

(1) 'Arise.' The voice of God demands energy in His service, and a readiness to obey. It is fatally easy to rest on our oars; and if we do that, slowly but surely we begin to glide down the stream. The Christian life is a warfare; a quest after truth; a clearing of the obstacles which hinder the flow of the Divine life in us. Here are some who are despondent; they are inclined to give up the struggle; their past failures oppress them; they are tired with the long road, and have thrown themselves down by the wayside content to see others pass by. To them, too, comes the summons, 'Arise.' 'When the fight begins within himself,' says Browning, 'a man's worth something.' We prove our worth by fighting. Despair is a word which should find no place in the dictionary of a Christian. Why despair when there is the power of God at our disposal? We need not fight alone; God is ready to help us. After all, the citadel to a man's personality is his will. 'I ought; I can; I will.' These three words give the clue to the nature of a man's religion. It is a matter of the will; the emotion and the intellect, of course, come into religion, but the important thing is the will. And the word 'Arise,' is a direct appeal to our wills.

(2) Then, having arisen, we are to 'shine.' 'Ye are the light of the world,' said Jesus. 'A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid; neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' To shine, translated into more prosaic speech, means not being ashamed of our religion.

¶ I know [he told his mother] that in Oxford one is thought a mild type of imbecile if one displays any *personal* enthusiasm for the cause that is one day to conquer the world. . . . I do feel that at the risk of being thought a prig or a fanatic one must hang out one's colours. . . . I told a great friend of mine this at Trinity, who is a total unbeliever at present, and he said, 'Yes, I see that you cannot but tell of it, since you have had it personally shown to you.'

It is hard [he confessed to a sister], I find it awfully so here; but it will be always hard whatever our sphere of life, and yet it will be always our business. . . . Do I speak at a

meeting? I am asked, 'Are you better than those here, that you speak to them?' Nay, but Christ is better—I do not speak of myself but of Him.¹

And to shine means also to be active in the service of God. We must diffuse our light; we must be mirrors reflecting the light of God. Many people are afraid of being thought religious; there are others who keep their religion as a kind of private charm or safeguard. They are out to save their own souls; they do not do their share of bearing the burden of the world; they leave God and others to carry it. But if one thing is more certain than another it is that Christianity is a religion of service for others. How this world is calling out for workers who will bring for its healing Christ's power! What problems there are; how thick the evils that lie upon human life! We shall solve them only if we each bring our contribution of service, and add it to the common good.

Religion, it has been said, is caught, not taught. That is profoundly true. Men are watching us all the time; they may not say anything, but they are watching the professing Christian to see if he is really true and shining. Every day we are witnessing by our lives either for or against Jesus Christ. We are shining, either with a bright light or a dim light. 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come.' That is the message to the man who feels he can do so little; he has tried again and again, and has failed. He forgets that his light is come. We know that the planets shine by reflecting the light from the sun; they have no light of their own; they receive light from the sun, and they shine by the sun's light. God is the source of the light that we have. He has given us our minds, our sense of right and wrong, our high thoughts, our love, and we are as planets revolving round God our Sun. 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come.' That thought sends us to Jesus Christ, the Light of men. We cannot do much shining by ourselves, but we can shine by His light.

¶ 'What was it that first led you to think of Christ and Christianity?' I have asked my young candidates for entrance into the catechumenate. I have had various answers. 'It was a dream,' some said. 'It was the reading of the Word of God,' said others. 'It was a sermon'—this not very frequently. Most frequent of all was the answer, 'It was Thomas

or James—or Luke,' naming some Christian convert or companion whose changed manner of life had stamped itself on his admiration. This impact of the Christian character on the mind and conscience of the African is, I believe, the greatest power the Gospel wields in bringing him to a knowledge of himself and his moral and spiritual needs.¹

O ye who taste that love is sweet,
Set waymarks for all doubtful feet
That stumble on in search of it.

Sing notes of love: that some who hear
Far off inert may lend an ear,
Rise up and wonder and draw near.

Lead life of love: that others who
Behold your life may kindle too
With love, and cast their lot with you.²

3. What an enormous difference Jesus Christ has made to human life! We can discover from the writings of those who lived in the Roman world just before He came, something of what life then was like. Men were hopeless and pessimistic and in despair. It is quite true that there were teachers and lecturers who went about telling men how to live, if they would find happiness. Some of the ideals that they held up were very beautiful and noble. But many a listener would say, 'How can I reach such a height? How can I hope to attain to that ideal? I have no power to reach it! Then into that world came Jesus Christ; and He did two things. He drove away the terrors and the fears that haunted the human breast. He set up for men that ideal and pattern of the true life, the life of the child of the Father in heaven. That was one thing He did, and it was a very wonderful thing, and the world has never outgrown the teaching of Jesus Christ about God. But the other thing He did was even more wonderful. He gave men power to live the higher life. Explain it how we will, it is a fact of history that when Jesus Christ came into the world there came to men a new energy and a new spring of hope. And He is doing the very same thing to-day. He is giving life to thousands. He is helping thousands to arise and shine, because He is Himself the living Saviour and Redeemer of mankind.

¹ A. Hetherwick, *The Gospel and the African*, 116.

² Christina G. Rossetti.

¹ C. E. Padwick, *Temple Gairdner of Cairo*, 28.

¶ A recent writer describes the central shrine of Russian worship. He pictures crowds every day gathering to pass in reverence before the form of the dead Lenin, and gaze for a moment on that still face. Whatever else the secret of this, it is because he had power. And in that kind of pathetic worship they are seeking to realize power, to draw it into their souls. We worship a living Christ. That is why we cannot even visit His grave. He is not there, because He is everywhere available. A French saint who came into the power of Christ, in later years describes how it happened with him. 'I saw that I had no power to put an end to the disorder of my life. I believed in the Holy Ghost in the only sense in which He met my needs, in the sense of an external supernatural action, exerted on me by a God who is as truly master of my heart as He is of external nature.' There is nothing He cannot do for us, and in us, and through us, if we are willing. If even we are willing to be made willing! To realize that fact, till it breaks through to our deepest being, is the secret of power.¹

Thou puttest into this frail hand of mine
The Light of Life, and sayest unto me,
'Arise, and shine!'
And I go forth, O God, reflecting Thee.

And would that never over such a Light
Might any dimness pass, or shadow fall,
Or gloom of night,
Or Thou appear as less than All in all;

And kneel in deepest joy to offer praise
That such a Gift is mine; and lift a prayer
For coming days,
That not a cloud may dim the Light I bear.

Visions of the City

Is. lx. 1.—'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

IN this famous chapter we have a vision of the City of God which all the nations will assemble to honour, the eternal home of peace and justice, the chosen abode of God Himself, who will illuminate it with His own light, brighter than the beams of the sun. Where is this city of the

¹ James Reid, *The Springs of Life*, 165.

prophet's vision, and when is its glory to be revealed? The Jew would answer, 'The place is Jerusalem, and the time is the near future.'

1. Others besides the Jews have had their vision of the City of God. The Greek Platonists had their heavenly city, of which all good men were already citizens. But if we asked them—Where is your heaven situated, and when is this glory to be revealed? they would answer—The place is everywhere and nowhere; the time is now, always, and never. It is not in time or in place. It is where God is, for it is in His mind. It is as eternal and immutable as God Himself. And if we asked the average, simple Christian the same question he would say—The time is the unknown future, the place is somewhere beyond the stars.

So Jews, Greeks, and Christians would answer, honestly but not truly. For the vision is too great for the framework in which we try to interpret it. The vision is a real revelation of God, but we do not see it clearly, and we do not understand it, and so we try to find a time and a place for it in our own world, within our own thoughts, to which it does not belong.

We can bring the matter to a test. Suppose that the prophet had seen the promises of this chapter literally fulfilled, suppose he had seen Jerusalem the capital of a world-empire, receiving tribute from servile and trembling subjects, suppose he had seen gold and silver as plentiful as brass and iron in Jerusalem—would all these tokens of material prosperity have delighted and satisfied him? Surely not. He would have said, 'This is not what God showed me in the vision. It is only what I said I had seen because I could not describe it better.' He would know that the religious value of the vision had vanished completely.

The case is really much the same with the religious philosopher, whose city is the eternal, invisible world. There are some men—Plato himself was evidently one of them—who have the extraordinary gift of visualizing their deepest thoughts, of forming intellectual images which are clearer and more real to them than the objects themselves. They actually see the beauty of justice and purity and chastity. These ideas create in their minds an atmosphere radiant with light and rich with colour in which the poet-seer can veil his spirit and return to his task with a wonderful sense of consecration,

peace, and strength. But if some tempter were to say to him, Describe your heavenly city more clearly and you shall have it, so to speak, in your hand, he would shrink and retire. Either his spiritual world in becoming concrete and visible would lose all its spirituality and would become a duplicate of the world itself, or it would refuse to take shape at all and he would find himself wandering through strange seas of thought, lost amid the immensities and the eternities while vainly seeking for the dead among the living.

¶ Cardinal Newman, in a beautiful passage, gives us this picture of heaven: 'To those who live by faith everything they see speaks of that future world; the very glories of Nature, the sun, moon, and stars, and the richness and the beauty of the earth, are as types and figures, witnessing and teaching the invisible things of God. All that we see is destined one day to burst forth into a heavenly bloom, and to be transfigured into immortal glory. Heaven at present is out of sight, but in due time, as snow melts and discovers what it lay upon, so will this visible creation fade away before those greater splendours which are behind it, and on which at present it depends. Our mortal bodies will then be found to contain within them an inner man, which will then receive its true proportions, as the soul's harmonious organ, instead of the gross mass of flesh and blood which sight and touch are sensible of.'

Taken literally, this means that heaven will be a new and greatly improved edition of earth, to begin at some date which has not been revealed to us. If this were literally and absolutely true, should we be satisfied? It is not too good to be true; it is not good enough to be true. It is like a picture of a sunset by Turner. It reminds us of a real sunset; but wonderful as it is, it gives us daubs of paint instead of the glory of the skies.

And is it not the same with the articles of the Christian faith? Take, for example, the Ascension of Christ. Should we like to see that event actually taking place? Would not a cold chill come over our devotions? The celestial vision would fade in the light of common day, and the religious meaning and value of this article of our faith would somehow have evaporated.

Religious people seldom ask themselves these questions, and so they are unfair to those who

say, quite truly, that no spiritual faith can be built on a foundation of physical miracles, however well attested. But the thinker is also wrong if he despises the plain man for his dogmatic picture-book. When a man holds a belief very strongly he regards its truth as so important to him that he ought to surround it with a sort of barbed-wire entanglement of stiff formalism, which does not prove him to be either foolish or dishonest, but only determined to keep the enemy's guns out of range.

2. Some will say that all articles of faith are just intellectual constructions put together with a purely practical object. Their truth consists in their practical value. If they *work*, if they help us along our life's journey, that is all the truth that we must demand from them. To give an illustration—when we choose a pair of spectacles we do not ask which is the most honest or truthful pair, but which pair will enable us to see straight. Now the fallacy here is in forgetting that shortsightedness or obliquity of vision in the spiritual life is curable. If we begin by being indifferent to truth we shall never see God as He is, and that means we shall never be like Him.

Others make not practical utility but pleasurable aims the touchstone of their religion. They choose that form of religion which makes them feel happy or at peace. But this kind of religion is not our Christian faith. For the Christian, religion is a desperately serious thing, and its object is certainly not to make people comfortable. What we have to strive with all our might to convince ourselves of is that the vision of the City of God is a vision of reality. It is not a pair of spectacles to help us to see straight. It is not a narcotic to soothe us in this troublesome world. It is not mere poetry, pleasing to the fancy. It is a vision of reality—'The great unseen, nowise the dark unknown,' as George Meredith says. An agnostic writer compares religion to a gorgeous curtain hung between us and reality. On the contrary, what he calls reality is the curtain, and we can see the shadows moving behind it and the light shining through it.

¶ Principal J. C. Shairp, in his *Lectures on Poetry*, has this: 'Two things there are which, if once admitted into the mind, change our whole view of this life—the belief that this world is but the vestibule of an eternal state of

being; and the thought of Him in whom man lives here, and shall live for ever. These, as they are the cardinal assumptions of religion, are hardly less the ground tones which underlie all the world's highest poetry.'

3. The vision of the City of God is a vision of reality, but it is a vision, not knowledge—no knowledge of that which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive.' We pray, 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.' We believe that it will be done. We believe that all things will work together for good to those who love God. But when we descend to the particular, and encourage ourselves by saying the cause of justice and humanity cannot be defeated because there is a heaven above us, when we use the words of the Old Testament promising victory and prosperity to the righteous, we are forgetting the lessons of history, which shows us a great shadow lying across the earth—it is the shadow of the Cross. In our very deepest heart of hearts we would not have it otherwise. We are called to be under the banner of the Crucified.

And so we look for another country, that is, a heavenly, and yet we know that even in the cloudy and dark day this earth of ours is no derelict outcast of God's Kingdom, but that part of heaven where our lot is cast, a world marred, but a world redeemed, through which we walk by faith, not having received the promises, but beholding them afar off, and remembering the words of St Paul, that the object for which Jesus Christ ascended up far above all heavens was not to leave us comfortless, but that He might fill all things.

Enlargement of Heart

Is. lx. 5.—'Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged.'

In these words the prophet gives expression to a universal principle of human conduct when men are placed in circumstances similar to those set forth in the preceding paragraph of the chapter. 'The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising . . . thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.' When new privileges are conferred on man, when new duties and responsibilities are recognized, then the

heart of the man trembles, throbs with excitement, and his nature is enlarged to meet the responsibilities of the new situation. That is the principle set forth in the text.

1. The word 'heart' has a very wide meaning in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. It is used to express the whole inward nature of man. It is the seat of knowledge, the home of feeling, and the spring of action. So the prophet here, when he says 'Thine heart shall fear and be enlarged,' does not refer merely to the emotions, or to the actions, or to the thoughts of men, but to all of these together. The people of God will see more clearly, will have wider horizons, will have larger thoughts, and thoughts more adequate to the facts. They will have wider, deeper, truer feelings, and they will be able to embody these in more fitting forms of action. While this is true, yet the main stress may be laid on the emotions, on the feelings present in the hearts of the people of God when the glory flashed on them, and the nations came to the brightness of their rising.

As to the word rendered 'fear,' it is not exactly fear itself that is meant, but the excitement, the exaltation which comes when a man trembles on the verge of action. It is the thrill which comes to a man as he girds himself for a new departure. Many emotions mingle in the expression which is rendered 'fear.' Anxiety, expectation, dread, hope, the longing to take the plunge, and the hesitation to take it, are all blended here in the complex state so briefly indicated by the prophet.

'Thine heart shall throb with an emotion corresponding to the greatness of the situation.' So it is in life at every great crisis. If we take up the great roll of the heroes of faith recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and consider them one after another, we shall find ourselves in the sphere of great emotions, in the presence of men whose hearts feared and were enlarged. In all of them there is a similar experience, a sudden revelation of a high calling, a swift intuition of a great work to do or a great sacrifice to make, a reluctance to rise to the height of the occasion, and a shrinking from the responsibility of the work pointed out by the vision. Think, for example, of Moses. His heart throbbed with the desire to go forth to the help of his people, but his courage failed as he thought of the magnitude of his

task and of his own felt unfitness for it. So his heart feared, and the fear grew as he thought of the work he had to do, but with the greatness of the emotion came the enlargement of heart which was one of the elements that made him fit for the mighty work of being the leader and lawgiver of Israel.

Send whom Thou wilt ! All choice is Thine,
Thou canst fulfil Thy set decree
Through other hands more meet to be
Upborne in Thy so vast design :
Lord, I beseech Thee—send not me !

Had Moses failed to go, had God
Granted his prayer, there would have been
For him no leadership to win—
No pillared fire, no magic rod,
No wonders in the land of Zin ;

No smiting of the sea—no tears
Ecstatic shed on Sinai's steep—
No Nebo, with a God to keep
His burial ! only forty years
Of desert-watching with his sheep !¹

¶ The prospect of so weighty a work, and of being so distinguished from many whom I esteem before myself, brought me very low, and such were the conflicts of my soul that I had a near sympathy with the Prophet, in the time of his weakness, when he said : ' If thou deal with me, kill me, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thy sight.' But I soon saw this proceeded from the want of a full resignation to the Divine will. Many were the afflictions which attended me, and in great abasement, with many tears, my cries were to the Almighty for His gracious and fatherly assistance, and after a time of deep trial I was favoured to understand the state mentioned by the Psalmist more clearly than ever I had done before ; to wit : ' My soul is even as a weaned child.' Being thus helped to sink down into resignation, I felt a deliverance from that tempest in which I had been sorely exercised, and in calmness of mind went forward, trusting that the Lord Jesus Christ, as I faithfully attended to Him, would be a counsellor to me in all difficulties.²

2. First the vision and the call, next the thrill of feeling which responds to the call, and

¹ Margaret J. Preston.

² *The Journal of John Woolman.*

then the enlargement of heart which makes one fit for the working out of the call—such is the order of the prophet's statement. It is universally true of every true workman and his work, whatever be the sphere of his work ; true of the thinker and his thought, true of the poet and his vision of the beautiful, true of the man of science and his insight into the processes of Nature, and true in general of every man to whom comes any vision of the true, the beautiful, and the good. To everyone, brooding over his life and its possibilities, comes the vision of what may be in his life and work. Great ideals flash on us, and perhaps we cherish them, or perhaps frown on them and call them by contemptuous names, and then they are apt to vanish into nothingness. The high ideals of our youth give place to those of a lower, more practicable kind, as we think, and life sinks down into the commonplace and the usual. Thus often in human life the visions of youth pass into the background and vanish away ; and there are many lives that never thrill to the touch of a high ideal, or tremble at the presence of a great opportunity.

But the work of great men has been the outcome of spirits which have been true to their high ideals, and have kept the vigour and purity of their dreams untarnished by the prose of life, and have refused to lower their ideals to the level of those who have allowed the vision of the heavenly to pass out of their lives. The vision came to them, their hearts thrilled to it, and they toiled to make it visible to other men, and they succeeded. So to-day we live in a world of wide horizons, we have thoughts which travel through eternity, because these were true to what they saw, and embodied it in words and deeds which other men may read and imitate.

3. Passing from the fact that this has been so in the case of all the great workers of the world, let us consider the state of mind depicted here. For the prophet implies that without the fear, the thrill, the excitement, there can be no enlargement of heart, no widening of the nature, no upbuilding of character. Wide and deep feeling are needed in the making of man. Nor is deep feeling possible without the vision of the true, the beautiful, and the good. Feeling keeps pace with intelligence, and it responds to every enlargement of the vision. Feeling is

needed to strengthen the vision, and the wider vision calls forth a deeper emotion, and these translate themselves into action.

There are those who fail to respond to the vision, and who thus lose the power of feeling that deep emotion which the prophet describes. There are those who respond to the vision once, and, having seen and felt the glory of it, desire to live always in the enjoyment of that exalted emotion. But the emotion passes, as the vision becomes familiar. The great emotion was not meant to last, it was meant to accomplish something, and having done its work it passes away. Nor have we any right to be miserable on that account. Both the vision and the emotion were meant to pass into action, and to be fixed into character, and we are meant to pass on to higher forms of the vision, and to other and perhaps deeper forms of emotion. For no vision can exhaust the great reality of truth, of beauty, and of goodness, and we must press on to see the highest and to love it. The way to maintain freshness of feeling is to obtain fresh views of truth, fresh conceptions of duty, and new powers of work.

¶ 'A voice sounds within me,' said Luther, and calls imperiously, "Come higher and still higher."

¶ There are those who long to feel over again the fervour of their first love, to recall the exaltation of their first Communion, or the thrill of their first religious experience. They say, plaintively, in the words of the hymn :

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord ?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His word ?

But that is not really a Christian sentiment. It is not in line with New Testament experience. The New Testament speaks of a continuous and growing experience of the presence and power of Christ. The Christian rejoices in the experience of grace he has had, but he goes on to something greater, richer and more Divine.

We ought not to seek or to ask for a repetition of the former vision, or for a renewal of former experiences ; there is some better thing in store for us. There is the fullness of Him in whom there is all the fullness of God. There is the treasure of truth for the intelligence, there is the wealth of eternal life for the heart, there

is the clearness of guidance for the conscience and the will in Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But each advance is costly, and repeats, on a higher stage, the features of the former experience. There is the desire to linger in the experience and to continue in the enjoyment of that exalted state of feeling. But the laws of human nature and the voice of the Lord call to us and say, 'Arise, let us go hence.'

So the text is not a description of one step in the Christian life, or of one supreme effort ; it sets forth a law of continued Christian experience. It is not possible to stand still, for every situation is speedily exhausted, and when a situation is exhausted it cannot call forth that tide of feeling without which life would be without interest or stimulus. Every conquest is the signal for a new campaign, every victory the call to a new effort, and every effort may be described in the words of the text, 'Thine heart shall fear and be enlarged.'

The Homing Instinct

Is. lx. 8.—'Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows ?'

THERE is nothing more beautiful in the realm of animal life than the instinct which draws a bird to its nest. They knew of it, and watched it, and even used it, in the earliest ages of which history gives us any trace. In one species of birds the homing instinct has been trained and developed until it has become wonderful as well as beautiful ; the achievements of the homing pigeon are a kind of miracle which people admire and utilize but can scarcely understand. Long before the time of Christ, this bird's powers were known in Egypt and other lands. The Romans used pigeons to bring them news of the Olympic games. In the twelfth Christian century the city of Baghdad had a pigeon post office, by which communication was kept up with the chief cities of Syria. In the earlier decades of the nineteenth century fortunes were made on the London Stock Exchange because some business men got pigeon messages from Boulogne, which anticipated by several hours the ordinary Paris mail. But the homing instinct of a bird is at its loveliest when it is not developed for any sporting or commercial

purpose, when it is free and unfettered, and untrained save by Mother Nature herself. Men have watched it in all ages, and have found in it parables full of meaning—hints of what they themselves would like to be and to do if their wingless souls could but rise to the height of their own desires. ‘And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest; I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest.’

1. The prophetic hope, taught of God, was that the pride and joy of Israel should be restored—should be more than restored, should be extended until the whole world should see her light and pay tribute to her greatness. By and by history was made that turned the prophecy from a dream into a reality. There came the Jewish dispersion; the sons and daughters of Israel were scattered by the hundred thousand across the known world. It was exile in a sense, but it was not the old compulsory exile, brought about by military defeat; it was voluntary exile, entered into for many cogent and alluring reasons. Some Jews sought military and political employment. Some sought lands more fertile and more easily productive than their own. Some sought a life more free and varied than the somewhat stern temper of Judea allowed. Most were tempted by the opportunities of commerce which the world was now opening up, combined with the facilities and rights which the Greeks were prepared to bestow upon immigrant Jews. So, for one reason or another, they scattered and settled across the world. And Jerusalem's world-wide empire began. There is nothing more amazing in history. Wherever her sons and daughters went, they kept their loyalty to their Mother City and her Temple, the centre of their faith and worship. When they prayed, they turned their faces towards Jerusalem. When they worshipped, they remembered the sacrifices which were offered for the whole nation within her Temple courts. When they came into contact with the ugly realities of heathenism, the contact but flung them back with a more passionate love and pride upon their own purer faith. They sent their annual half-shekel to the Temple treasury. There were elaborate organizations for collecting and forwarding this; and when they could they made their pilgrimages to see Jerusalem with their own eyes, that their feet

might stand within her gates: So the ships of Tarshish in very truth brought her sons from far, and their silver and their gold with them. The sons and daughters of Jerusalem across all the broad world came to her; when they could not come themselves, they sent their winged desires and prayers. The homing instinct of the human heart has never expressed itself more passionately or more persistently.

2. Now that same homing instinct abides, winged and powerful, in the souls of men, and of course it takes different forms and shows itself on different levels. Sometimes it takes a *patriotic* form: it is love for a land; the old country is the home country; and the ships of Tarshish, transformed out of all recognition into the liners that plough the ocean highway, still bring her sons and daughters from afar. Sometimes it takes a *domestic* form; it is love for one's own house and home. Some people feel it very strongly at the end of a holiday or any long spell of absence; they will tell you that the best part of going away is just the opportunity of coming back.

¶ Those who remember Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* will recall how Jan Ridd came home from his stay in London. He had been gone only a few months, but to the country boy it had been an exile in which the magnificence he had seen and the drama of which he had been a part did not compensate him for the separation from the familiar comfort of his household. When at last he drew near to his Plovers Barrows farm every nook and slope and hillside of it had a word for memory and a warmth to throw around his heart. Here was the peat-rick where he hid his dinner when he could not go home for it, and there was the bush, with the wild thyme growing round it, where his sister Annie had found the swarm of bees. Here was the pool where they washed the sheep, and there the hollow where once he had shot three ducks. The first sheep that he saw on the moor with the great red J. R. on his side made his spirit leap, and he shouted the sheep's name, and it knew him, and Jan leaned over and stroked his head and swore he should never be mutton.¹

And then the same instinct can also take a *religious* form. Who are these that fly as the doves to their windows? They are the souls, not of Israel alone, but of every age, of every

¹ Joseph M. M. Gray.

creed, who have found or who are trying to find their home in God.

How is the instinct awakened? In many different ways. Sometimes it is the response to *vision and revelation*. That is the conception of this great passage: 'The Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.' Then the homing instinct shall by that vision be awakened and even 'the Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising.' Over and over again it has been so. Men have seen first, and seeing have desired, and their souls have been as birds upon the wing until they found rest in the arms of God. Brother Lawrence saw the glory of God in the power that could clothe a leafless winter tree with the beauty of the springtime, and henceforward he was all desire to know this God and to serve Him and to live with Him. How often men have been reading the Bible, with eyes that saw no day-spring and hearts that tasted no sweetness! And on a sudden the splendour has broken, and some word has given wings to their souls, bringing them to the Father's feet.

Sometimes, again, the instinct is awakened rather from the other side, through the bitter lessons of *pain and need*. They say that the eider-duck will suffer his nest upon the rocks of the Norwegian fjord to be robbed once and will not depart; he plucks the down from his own breast and lines it again. A second time the nest may be robbed, and still he stays, stripping his own breast once more. But if his treasure for the third time be taken from him, he will stay no longer; he spreads his wings and flies southwards to lands of the sun. That is how some souls have been taught to wing their flight towards God—not by joy, but by sorrow; not by vision, but by necessity; not by exhilaration, but by desperation. 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' He sought the home he had not sought before, because he was hungry and miserable and ready to die. There have been many like him. 'Lord, remember me,' said the Malefactor, out of his agony, his faith nerved by its own need to flutter across the space between Christ's Cross and his own.

But when this homing instinct in its highest form is really quickened, whether it be directly by the grace of vision, or indirectly by the discipline of pain and need, who can analyse

all its contents? Some of the deepest facts of our being are here—here focussed and here expressed. The faith of our fathers is here—the instincts and the aspirations that made them the men they were—come to life again in us their children. The lessons learned in our own childhood are here—revived and confirmed by experiences which childhood could not understand. The essential constitution of our own souls is here—made in the likeness of God, drawing towards Him by spiritual gravitation, tending to Him as doves to their nest or as waters to the sea. The memory, perhaps, of some who are gone pours its influence into this same instinct—those who lived with us in God and for God, and who, when they went away, bade us meet them at God's right hand.

¶ Mr Canton has a weird little poem in which he tells how, in solitary rooms, when dusk is falling, he can hear the comrades of his boyhood calling, 'Home! home! home!' as they used to call it from plain and wood and river when the day's racing and chasing were done. He hears it again from the ancient years, the signal cry of scattered comrades.

I pause and listen while the dusk is falling;
My heart leaps back through all the long
estrangement
Of changing faith, lost hopes, paths dis-
enchanted;
And tears drop as I hear the voices calling
Home! home! home!

3. The important thing is this, that whensoever and howsoever this homing instinct arises in our hearts, we must not waste or neglect it. We must obey it. We must find in it the impetus that shall carry us to our true home and resting-place. If it does nothing else, let it bring us to His house. Not seldom have men found His temple to be a half-way house—more than a half-way house—to Himself. And let it teach us to pray; we shall reach our resting-place that way more quickly than by any other. And let it above all lead us to Christ, who has come from God to show us the homeward track, who is Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

¶ There is a medieval legend which tells how a ship laden with pilgrims for Jerusalem went down in a great tempest. Only a few survived, but those who did escape beheld a strange sign upon the sea. Out of the chaos where the ship

went down they saw a great company of white doves, in twos and threes and fives and tens ; and these, having come together as a cloud, flew up straight to heaven. And those who saw rejoiced, for they took it as a token that those who had failed to reach the earthly Jerusalem had found a straight path to Heavenly Zion.

They throng from the east and the west,
The north and the south, with a song ;
To golden abodes of their rest
They throng.

Eternity stretches out long :
Time, brief at its worst or its best,
Will quit them of ruin and wrong.

A rainbow aloft for their crest,
A palm for their weakness made strong :
As doves breast all winds to their nest,
They throng.

¹ Christina G. Rossetti.

Religion and Art

Is. lx. 13.—‘The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary ; and I will make the place of my feet glorious.’

THIS sixtieth chapter is one of the most perfectly beautiful pieces of literature in the Bible. It is in itself sufficient to refute the charge that the Jews had no genius on the artistic side of human life. Of painting and sculpture that may be true. Certainly they left nothing to rival the achievements of the Greeks in the plastic arts. But where great literature is concerned Israel need not fear comparison with Greece. In book after book of the Old Testament it is made luminously clear that in the form of beautiful writing the Hebrew needed no instruction from men of another race.

1. We must not look on all the beauty which has come into the world under the inspiration of Christ as an escape from the grim austerity of the Jewish spirit, though undoubtedly the world's debt to Christianity on the æsthetic side is far greater than its debt to Judaism. More than that : the spirit of artistic vision and accomplishment, baptized into Christianity, has enriched the world with a varied loveliness to

which even the creations of the Hellenic genius must yield first place.

What better, may we ask, had Christianity, to give ? The answer is, ‘An art which reveals more of God and of His dealings with man.’ To call Greek art unspiritual would be a monstrous calumny. But the great Greek artists had to put the idealism into the religion ; it was not there as a fountain of inspiration on which they could draw. Greek art was a greater thing than Greek religion. But art can never be a substitute for religion except at a higher price than man or nation ought to pay. For art by itself cannot enable man to pass beyond the country of his earthly dwelling and find his home in a heavenly Kingdom of God. It must bid him be content with earth's loveliness ; of a yet more lovely city within which man may at last behold the King in His beauty it can say nothing. The only divinity which art by its own power can witness to and worship is the divinity resident in the wonders of Nature and in the most excellent works of man. And such divinity is not really divine. It is but Nature and man thrust into the place which truly belongs only to the Eternal and Invisible God, who is other than Nature, who is other than man. It is the point at which art is but one remove from idolatry, from the worship of the creature in place of the Creator.

But through the advent of Christ, and under the inspiration of the great doctrines of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection, a new thing has happened, a new relation has been created between religion and art. True religion, grounded not in human imagination even at its best, but in God's revelation of His nature and purposes, provided the artist with material of unparalleled richness upon which he might work. And in glad response to religion's gift, art in the persons of painters and poets and musicians and architects brought to light the wonder and the beauty of religion. Christian art could not have adorned the world had it not been for the Christian doctrine of God. In its light the great Christian artists have themselves seen light, and enabled us to see it. There is that kinship between the artist and the prophet. Neither is trying to express himself. Each is trying to express to others the truth which he himself has seen, to make the Word of the Lord which has come to him a word of meaning to them. Not all prophets

are true prophets, and not all artists are illuminated by a vision of divine truth. But when that truth is in possession of the soul of prophet or artist, then there arises in power a true interpreter of the ways of God.

2. The idea that Christianity and art are so embarrassing to one another that their best attitude is the formal correctness of comparative strangers is both ideally and historically false. Certainly there were temporary estrangements which gave rise to the impression of deep-rooted mutual hostility. But it is not true that a man must choose between Christianity and art. It is not true that Christianity is a religion of gloom and moroseness, which tends to sterilize human powers and darken human life, while in contrast art embodies the very essence of sweetness and light. The facts will not support this version of the case. Try to think of a Christendom to-day stripped of the creations of Christian art—as having never possessed them. Would it be the world only, and not the Church as well, that would be the poorer if it lacked the *Sistine Madonna* and Leonardo's *Last Supper*, Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Bach's *Passion Music* and Handel's *Messiah*, York Minster and St Paul's Cathedral? These are but a few of the works of highest artistic genius which have enriched the world during that era which begins with the year of our Lord.¹

It is therefore evident that Christianity is not divorced from, or indifferent to, art, but, on the contrary, it creates an art—an art which is not only distinctively Christian, but a very appreciable advance on the art which went before. Now it is something to secure the position that art and Christianity are not antagonistic, a dangerous error into which fanaticism has occasionally fallen—dangerous because it is not the truth. But to see clearly the connection between the two is more difficult, because neither the one nor the other has ever made much effort to express the relation. Religion, Christianity, takes its way without explaining art, and art takes its way without explaining Christianity. To interpret them by one another, is a task well worthy of our thought, and it might incidentally result in a great spiritual revival, for to bring the art of Christendom and the Christendom of to-day into close contact and organic connection

would be to start Christianity itself on the new era of conquest in the heart and spirit of man.

The Dutch artist, Vincent van Gogh, calls our attention to the fact, which becomes evident when we reflect, that Christ—the character of Christ, the work of Christ, the story of Christ, the very setting of the story—is the noblest work of art in the world. The great artists have striven to reproduce Him or things connected with Him, and their effort to do that has made them the greatest artists—Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Fra Angelico. They have attempted to reproduce Him or things connected with Him, and in making that attempt they have risen to the height of plastic art, but they have not succeeded, as we all recognize, in making anything so beautiful as Jesus Christ Himself—they have tried and toiled after Him nobly, but in vain. Take one instance. Think of that little paragraph in the Gospel of St John which represents the Master stooping down and writing on the ground, while His word carries conviction to the conscience of the accusers of an injured woman, and represents Him rising at last to His feet and saying to the woman, 'Where are thy accusers? Did no man condemn thee?' and her replying, 'No man, Lord,' and Him saying, 'Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more'—it does not require any skill to show that this is a perfect work of art. It presents a picture in which every element of greatness occurs. A universal note is struck. The human element comes in, pity and love and healing and restoration are at work; and we know we are in the presence of an Artist. There is in the Person and the life, the character and the work of Jesus an element that we can only call 'creative art.' It captures the world, and is the very fountain head of art and beauty.

¶ Here is an illustration from the mission field. Next to Uganda there is a native State known as Busoga, and the king of this State, in the early years of the century, was a typical African despot. He had a vast harem of women whom he would take with him into battle in order that they might carry his weapons; two wives carried his weapons in each battle. He was a sceptic who delighted to pour contempt upon the magicians of his own country, and to deride the spirits on which they called. He was the typical savage, the barbarian. And no effort that was made by missionaries or others affected him until in the year 1906 it chanced

¹ J. K. Mozley, in *The Guardian*, Oct. 28, 1932.

that they were showing some stereopticon pictures of the life of Christ, and that series of pictures presented to King Tabingwa actually converted him. He became another character. He sought baptism, and was baptized in the presence of a thousand of his subjects. The complete transformation was produced by seeing the life of Jesus as it was presented in the comparatively imperfect form of the stereopticon.

3. But there is another relation of Christ to art. To quote an artist: 'Of all philosophers and sages, Christ was the only one whose principal doctrine was the affirmation of immortality and eternity, and the nothingness of death and the necessity and importance of truth and resignation. He lived serenely as an artist, as a greater artist than any other, for He despised marble, clay, and the palette and worked upon the living flesh; that is to say this marvellous Artist, who eludes the grasp of that coarse instrument the neurotic and confused brain of modern man, created neither pictures nor books; He says so Himself quite majestically. He created real, living men, immortals. That is a solemn thing, more particularly because it is true.'

But now if we discover the clue which explains the course of Christian art, do we not also find the criterion for estimating all art movements to-day, and was there ever a period when it was more necessary to get some criterion, when art is rushing into all kinds of extravagances, and when it is producing all kinds of ugliness in the name of art? Do we not require a criterion, and have we not discovered it here? We can even use the phrase 'Art for Art's sake' when we have discovered that Christ is the great work of art and also the great Artist. We have the standard of beauty and truth that we need. With this standard we cannot mistake the decadent, the unclean, the merely sensual, for beauty. With this standard we know at a glance that beauty is allied to purity, and that it comes out of the beauty that is God, the *eternal* beauty, and is allied with immortality.

We claim, therefore, art as essentially Christian. Art is one of the ways by which joy may be maintained, and by which we may obey the commandment to rejoice in the Lord always, and again to rejoice. It is one of the ways by which it is possible for human life to

be a sustained melody of joy; and we are not at liberty to disregard this way. Art need not decay—the joy of art need never decay because beauty is everywhere. It is not a refined discovery of a few select minds. Everywhere beauty is to the seeing eye; and where the eye cannot see, still beauty is there to the hearing ear; and where the ear cannot hear, still beauty is there to the touch; and even if touch fails, beauty is there to the thought. Wherever consciousness is, beauty can be found. The poetry of life, the art of life, can penetrate a mind that has lost its senses, like the mind of Helen Keller. It can penetrate every mind; and beauty, that Divine creation, that flash of the life of God, can reach us any day and anywhere. The poets have caught the music of the world, and they have put it into harmony of words that cannot pass, and the musicians have caught the music of the world, and made it the possession of mankind. It has taught us to look on human beings with untold delight—the exquisite mechanism of the body, the workings of the mind, and the expansion of the soul.

¶ Michelangelo said, 'Nor does God vouchsafe to reveal Himself to me anywhere more than in some lovely mortal veil, and that alone I love because He is mirrored therein!'¹

We must work for this closer association between these two mighty factors in life, because the lesson which they teach is the lesson that the only values of life which are eternal and, therefore, really relevant, are the mighty trinity of truth, beauty, and goodness. For the last 150 years the amazing development and success of industry and commerce have tended to obscure this fact: man does not live by bread alone. Further, the more art and religion are associated the more men's attention will be redirected to that Life in which all these values were perfectly united and exhibited. The Babe in the Manger and the Sufferer on the Cross is still the last word, and the highest word on that art of life which for a few short years we have the chance to learn. If art is self-expression, then we must remember that it can never express itself without service and sacrifice. At the Cross of Jesus, as we realize every time we think of it, all the inspiration of the true and the beautiful and the good

¹ R. F. Horton, *The Springs of Joy*, 23.

alights and burns undimmed. Let each of us make his life a work of art ; an exhibition, that is, in personality and character, of the eternal values. This is what makes life worth living. At the Cross of Jesus, through the love of Jesus, we can find the skill and the grace to do it.¹

The Hallowing of Civic Life

Is. lx. 17, 18.—' I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness . . . thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.'

1. 'OFFICERS' and 'exactors' are not modern terms in communal life ; let us replace them with present-day equivalents. The officers of a city or town we call the corporation or the town councillors, exactors we call magistrates. Now how does the text sound ? ' I will make thy councillors peace, and thy magistrates righteousness.' That is a description of hallowed civic life. In a community which really acknowledges God, councillors regard their duty as religious. We owe very much to men of leisure, still more to busy men, who give a great deal of time to civic affairs with the simple intention of serving the community, men who take a proper pride in their native town or the town of their adoption.

¶ Plutarch, after his education at Athens, did not remain in the city of culture, which would have been so congenial to him, but went back to Chaeronea and obscurity to be a magistrate. If men laughed to see him inspecting the measurement of tiles and the carrying of stones and cement, ' It is not for myself,' he said, ' that I am doing this, but for my native place !'

2. The special emphasis here is on the *spirit* in which councillors are to do their work. ' I will make thy councillors peace, and thy magistrates righteousness.' God will do that. God is the only sufficient source of patience and of power for public life. This is beautifully illustrated in the portraits of some of the rulers of Venice in her period of greatness, ' where we find the victorious doges painted neither in the toil of battle nor the triumph of return ; nor set forth with thrones and curtains of state ; but kneeling, always crownless, and returning thanks to God for His help, or interceding for

the nation in its affliction.'¹ If the Venetians painted their doges kneeling and interceding for their city, let us avoid regarding a Mayor and Corporation attending Divine service as merely a decent formality. It is the occasional recognition that they are not only Christian men as individuals, but a body of men who have a Christian ideal in view for their town.

In this chapter there is a remarkable blending of the material and moral interests of the Jerusalem that is to be. That is as it should be. Sometimes our spiritual culture suffers from its failure to participate in material interests. We have left secular interests to be governed by secular aims, instead of remembering that we are to serve God in them and by means of them. The spiritual cannot do without material and outward concerns, or it loses touch with a big province of life, loses reality. Material concerns cannot do without the spiritual, or they become debased by the wrong motives that come into play, self-seeking, desire for reputation, local influence, personal profit. When citizens realize that their spiritual and material interests are intertwined in the way the prophet represents, then their material interests are ennobled and their spiritual life is robust. It has been well said that ' the mission of Christianity is to win humanity in all its phases, its science and philosophy, its literature and art, its society and policy, its every activity, to Christ.'

¶ It would mean new life for society if the Church would lift up glowing ideals for local communities, ideals that it could rejoice and glory in. We want to emulate and surpass the great civic traditions of earlier days, when as in Greece and Rome the love and service of one's city was a passion and a religion, and when the private wealth of the citizens was lavished upon objects of public use. We want to recover the spirit of the Middle Ages which poured its resources of culture into the creation of city churches designed to satisfy every legitimate desire for knowledge, beauty, social organization, and amusement ; which ministered to every instinct for man's fellowship with God and man ; and which made life in some ways gorgeous and joyful, even for the poor and diseased, with a solemn but magnificent splendour.²

¹ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*.

² M. Spencer, *Social Function of the Church*, 186.

¹ F. T. Woods, *Great Tasks and Great Inspirations*, 156.

3. If we are to get the ideal realized for our nation or our town we must have a very high personal ideal for ourselves. We cannot shift our responsibility on to town councillors and magistrates. Their efficiency for the public welfare largely depends upon the tone of public sentiment and the strength of public spirit behind them. Peace and righteousness must possess us as well as them. There is a striking passage in Milton's *Second Defence of the English People*. He is speaking of the victories of peace which must follow those of war; and he says: 'Your chance either of winning or keeping liberty will be not a little affected, fellow-citizens, by what you are yourselves. And unless that liberty, which is of such a kind as arms can neither procure nor take away, which alone is the fruit of piety, of justice, of temperance and unadulterated virtue, shall have taken deep root in your minds and hearts, there will not long be wanting one who will snatch from you by treachery what you have acquired by arms.' Strength depends in the last resort on character. Righteousness exalteth a nation; and a nation is wholly righteous when its people are all righteous, good citizens because of their loyal and active devotion to God and to men and the self-discipline which keeps them obedient to the moral law within them.

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
Yet not for power (power of herself
Would come uncall'd for) but to live by law,
Acting the law we live by without fear;
And, because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

'Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.' The gates of Praise cannot stand at all unless they are fitted into the walls of Salvation. Whether Praise means here the renown of the city, or that the citizens realize that they have cause to praise God, in either case the reason for such praise is that the walls are Salvation. And what does that mean? Surely that the people are conscious of being enfolded in the protection of the God whom they obey. If we have a religion like that, we shall be very robust citizens. And more than that, we shall be full of praise. A city composed of men like that would resound with praise. Its gates would be praise indeed, with such impregnable salvation for walls.

Men act according to the ideas they hold, the ideals that sway them. The men who do the most practical good are those who are constrained by the unseen and eternal sanctions. We need the wisdom which is from above; we need the sagacity and steady application and patient devotion of our best citizens to lead us, and the generous and informed support of all citizens behind them; and God will bless us, and help us to make the town we love an indestructible city like that which the prophet describes. Our light has come now, and we are to arise and shine; the Lord Himself is our everlasting light and our God and glory. And God is to be glorified in us more and more. We ourselves and our achievements are to be the work of His hands, that He may be glorified. If we have the faith and obedience, the power is with Him, and He will make no tarrying.

The Great Foreword of Christ

Is. Ixi. 1-3.—'The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the poor; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness' (R.V.).

ONE Sabbath day, quite at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus came to the synagogue of Nazareth and stood among the worshippers. After the reading of the Torah, or Book of the Law, the presiding minister looked about him for some one to read the portion from the prophetic writings. Any Jew of blameless life was eligible for this ministration. His eyes fell on Jesus, the carpenter, and he handed to Him the roll containing the Book of Isaiah that He might read therein. And Jesus unrolled it till He came to the words of the text. These He read to the people, and, handing the roll back to the minister and turning to the congregation, He said, 'To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.'

We can scarcely speak of Jesus making a quotation. These words had been uttered before, but the meaning was new. The phrases were another's, but the force of them was all His own. The sound of the words had been for five hundred years in the world's ears, but

now for the first time the full glory and divinity of them was breaking on the world's heart.

Let us hear Christ revealing His purpose among men—uttering the great foreword of His life. We find that it deals with two things, things which are not seldom related as cause and effect. They are sin and sorrow.

1. 'The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the poor.' Some one may say that there is no reference to sin there: but that is a superficial judgment. We have taken this word 'poor' and narrowed it down to an application always too limited and often quite false. We have a materialized idea of poverty. That is because we have a materialized idea of wealth. Money in our purse? That is a fool's definition. The beauty of the poet and the wisdom of the philosopher? Ideas in the mind? That is a better measure of the wealth of life. But there are hours when life's verdict stands that this also is the definition of a fool. It does not seem unfair to pass the same verdict of impotence upon the riches that sometimes cannot buy one hour of ease for body or for mind, and upon the culture that cannot destroy the fascination of sin, or lift the shadow of shame from the soul. The good tidings Jesus brought to the poor were good tidings for all men. It is the race that is poor. It is humanity that has been disinherited, defrauded by sin. It is the human soul that has been a spendthrift. By reason of sin we have all 'come down in the world.' We do not begin to rise, we do not lay our hands on life's real gain, till we come to that hour when we know that our only assets are penitence and regret. For that hour links our souls with the great foreword of Christ, and brings a promise of wealth to our sin-starved lives.

2. 'To proclaim liberty to the captives.' Here is another view of sin and another aspect of salvation. If we have been material and superficial in our thought about wealth and poverty, we have been equally so in our thought about liberty and bondage. We have thought of the great house of circumstance, with its high walls of constraint and its iron gates of necessity and its barred windows of vain desire. We have looked at the man tied, as we say, to his desk, his counter, his work-bench, his bed of pain; and we have turned from this vision

and said, 'Now we know what bondage is.' But we do not. We know nothing about it unless we have seen farther than that. It is the tragedy of history that the cry 'Down with the tyrants!' has so often come from the lips of men who have never seen where the real tyrannies of life lie. They are not in the setting of life, but in the substance of it. When we have seen the crushed soul, the captive hope, the fettered will, the earth-bound aspiration—then we have seen how deep and terrible a word is tyranny; then we have seen that the captivity of life is not when the tide of affairs sets us where we would not be, but when it makes us what we should not be. The snares of mean ambitions, the bonds of discontent and evil habit, blind prejudices and cruel self-seekings—these are the foes of liberty, and slaying we are free.

And the Advent message concerns 'the opening of the prison to them that are bound.' Jesus offers to each man that freedom which abides in all circumstance and lies beyond it too—the freedom of the soul to find God, and in Him its own true destiny.

¶ In his defence of Archibald Hamilton Rowan in 1792, John Curran, the Irish orator, said this fine thing about British freedom: 'No matter in what language his doom may have been pronounced; no matter in what disastrous battle his liberty may have been cloven down; no matter with what solemnities he may have been devoted upon the Altar of Slavery, the first moment he touches the sacred soil of Britain, the Altar and the God sink together in the dust, the soul walks abroad in her own majesty and he stands redeemed.'

3. 'To comfort all that mourn.' Sin and sorrow are radically related. That relationship is not always easily traced in individual lives; but as we grope our way back into the misty origins of this present order of life, this much seems to lie beyond question—that when sorrow slipped into life disobedience was holding the gate open. And surely it is wholly well that so long as there is sin there should be sorrow. The worst thing that can come to a man is the power to sin comfortably. If sin held open the gate by which sorrow entered life, sorrow now holds open the gate by which sin shall depart. Jesus in His life on earth showed He could do nothing for the self-satisfied, but He could do

everything for the penitent. 'Blessed are they that mourn.' Jesus does not spare the world the pain of penitence. No man can think greatly of his Saviour and lightly of his sin. To see the glory of God is to feel shame that we have so come short of it. To see the opportunity of to-day is also to know how blind we were yesterday. The folly of the bygone meets us again and smites us in the face. The evil done and the good undone come with stealthy tread behind us, and cast about our feet the snares of regret. And it is best that it should be so. For it is to the men with smitten faces and snared feet that Jesus comes with the word of His grace.

¶ It is strange how little we imagine in our youth, when the path of life is woven of the sunbeam and the rainbow, how deeply and bitterly we may yet weep in after life. But till those tears or their equivalent come on us, we are not yet men, but children. Life has not opened to us its terrible but dignifying secrets. We have not yet trodden the inner shrine, the portal of which is kept by sacred sorrow.

When the pain of a drear conviction of a lost life or a sinful heart is come upon you, do not go out with Judas into the night of despair; go out with Peter into the chill dawning, with Christ's look of reproachful love within your heart. Learn the meaning of that look, for it means forgiveness. Then remorse will pass into healing penitence. 'A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.'¹

4. 'To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion.' These words lead us on from the lonely, shadowed place of penitence and regret to the place of vision and of service. Sorrow is a most familiar figure in the streets of Zion. Her shadow falls across the path of those who do the City's business, her voice is in the ears of all who labour to repair the walls of righteousness and to make fair and glorious the temple of the Most High. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem. He wept for the blindness of those who knew not the day of their visitation, the hardness of those who passed unheeding on their brief and trivial business whilst Love Eternal was plucking at their very garments and pleading with their hearts. He wept over the wilfulness of the world: omnipotent Love mourned over all it could not do. There are grey and

weary hours for all who give themselves utterly to God's will and work in this world. How could it be otherwise when the voice that calls us to this work is the voice of the Man of Sorrows?

¶ The true cross of the Redeemer was the sin and sorrow of this world; *that* was what lay heavy on His heart, and that is the cross we shall share with Him, that is the cup we must drink of with Him if we would have any part in that Divine love which is one with His sorrow.¹

But in this thing God has not forgotten us. The coming of Christ into the world means that through the gates of the heart's unselfish sadness we may pass into the deathless joy of living. To go out into this world loving the law of Zion, serving the will of Zion, fighting the battle of Zion, is to be all one's days a son of sorrow, a secret mourner; but it is also to know, as no other can ever know it, the last deep gladness of life.

5. There are two phrases in this message to the sorrowful—whatever their sorrows be—which, taken together, say all that our hearts need to hear. One occurs at the beginning of the passage and the other at the end of it. 'The broken-hearted—the spirit of heaviness.' The suffering of life may be tragic; but since Jesus has come into the world it need never be mortal. He came to bind up the broken-hearted. And that not only for their own sakes. There is nothing more able to understand the needs of others, and to enter into healing communion with their sufferings, than the heart that has been broken by the coarse and bitter handling of the years, and bound up by the sure and healing fingers of Eternal Love. In the reckonings of man suffering is a disqualification for life: in the ways of God it is an equipment for life.

¶ In a letter of sympathy to an old friend on the death of his wife, Sir William Robertson Nicoll said: 'In your widowed home, in your loneliness, you will be in the company of a multitude of thoughts—of the past—the present—and the future. At such a time one cannot think with balance: the sorrow drains everything. But you will have strength from above. Unless all our lives and all our experience have been false, we sorrow not as those who have

¹ Stopford Brooke.

¹ George Eliot.

no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and being sure of that we are sure of all . . .

I have been through it all, and nobody knows what it is but those who have been through it. As Richard Baxter said when his wife died: "I will not be judged by any that never felt the like."

And then we have what the prophet so aptly called 'the spirit of heaviness.' Weariness, depression, dejection; hours of listless spirit, of languid purpose and disabled aspiration. There is a tragedy here also, all the greater and more disastrous for the fact that we do not see it. The spirit of heaviness spells inefficiency, ineffectiveness. In the world of the Spirit the way we do our duty is an essential part of that duty. A man may be dull and listless, and still work out a calculation of compound interest, or mend a cart-wheel. But to handle listlessly the task of teaching, guiding, comforting human souls is to bungle the work beyond the telling. Jesus came to fling about our souls the garment of praise. He knew, and He would teach us to know, that that is the only garb fit to wear when one enters the house of sorrow or has some errand in the dark places of life.

The Gospel of Freedom

Is. lxi. 1.—'To proclaim liberty to the captives.'

THE message and meaning of the gospel may be summed up in the passage from which the text is taken. Ours is a gospel of freedom, of deliverance. It has been said that under many forms the utterance of true religion is ever the same; that it is concentrated in the words, 'My soul is escaped, even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken, and we are delivered.' Christianity, as the central fact in the religious experience of mankind, sets forth at its highest this gospel of freedom, and alone gives it a certain basis.

1. First and foremost there comes the great fact which it proclaims—redemption, remission of sins. No sophistication can rid us of the fact that sin is a reality in human life, and that for many men a religion which offered no redemption would be a mockery. However

beautiful the character of Jesus, if it were only an impossible ideal it would sink us deeper in shame to contemplate it. True, perhaps, this doctrine has been preached with an excess of emphasis in the past; and in their desire to lay hold on the atoning work of Christ men have sometimes thrust into the background aspects of truth no less real. But the exaggeration is the exaggeration of a truth. In the heart of the old Evangelical faith lies the heart of the good news of 'God in Christ, reconciling us to Himself.' We can look for no success to any presentment of the faith which fails to preach 'forgiveness of sins through faith in his blood.' As a fact, however we explain it (and no theory of the Atonement is completely satisfying), the main source of the comfort men have had in the gospel for many ages has been this faith in the Cross of Christ, and its strange effect. One great observer, no orthodox Christian, has defined the essence of religious experience as the belief that something is wrong with ourselves and the world, and that what is wrong can be set right by making the proper connections with the higher powers. It is to help us to do this that Christ died for us; that His Death does give this help is mere outward fact undeniable even by the agnostic.

¶ He came. The soul the most full of love, the most sacredly virtuous, the most deeply inspired by God and the future, that men have yet seen on earth—Jesus. He bent over the corpse of the dead world, and whispered a word of faith. Over the clay that had lost all of man but the movement and the form, He uttered words until then unknown: *Love, sacrifice, a heavenly origin.* And the dead arose. A new life circulated through the clay, which philosophy had tried in vain to reanimate. From that corpse arose the Christian world, the world of liberty and equality. From that clay arose the true Man, the image of God, the precursor of humanity.

Christ expired. All He had asked of mankind wherewith to save them—says Lamennais—was a cross whereon to die. But ere He died He had announced the *glad tidings* to the people. To those who asked of Him from whence He had received it, He answered: From God, the Father. From the height of His cross He had invoked Him twice. Therefore upon the cross did His victory begin and still does it endure.¹

¹ Mazzini, *Faith and the Future*.

2. The gospel is the assurance of freedom, because it treats us as spirits with an eternal meaning. The 'awryness,' the sense that there is something wrong, may be got rid of by other methods than the Christian. Ours is not the only religion of redemption. The Buddhist and other Oriental systems also come to men offering deliverance. How do they do so? Either they say evil is a mere illusion, and on the view of the world as a whole sin has no meaning, for all acts are inevitably determined—there is no choice, no guilt, and therefore, of course, no goodness; or else, slightly varying the form, they tell us that personality, individual existence, is the only real source of evil, and the one hope for man is that of hopelessness. He must strive and strive in the faith that, after many reincarnations, the burden, not of his flesh, but of his spirit, shall be done away, and the whole individual being shall be reabsorbed in the All. To such men religion may be real, but it is little more than a vague reverence for the majesty of existence—cosmic emotion, as it has been termed. To the normal man or woman it is the most hateful of all lies. To tell him that his struggles and his sorrows, his hopes and his failures, all that makes him a character, are of no meaning save as they help to his ultimate disappearance is to offer him a prospect in truth more appalling than the worst material horrors of that physical hell which was taught by a past age. The Christian faith, however, says precisely the opposite. This 'awryness,' it says, is real; but it is a disease of the will, and it is not incurable. Christ died that in this world we may be fitted for our true destiny, the career of immortal spirits, interpenetrated by love, united in the vision of God, and ceaseless in service the one for the other. Christianity, and Christianity alone, sets man free to work out his own salvation, and assures him that his real work, the development of his character, is not vain, but endures for ever.

¶ Principal H. Wheeler Robinson says, 'In sharpest contrast with the original Buddhist solution of the mystery of life by the elimination of personality as an illusion, the Christian of all types finds an intensification and justification of his personality as the first result of his faith.'

3. Freedom for the human character, the eternal worth of the individual spirit, the

uniqueness of each one of us—these are the message of the gospel. It is indeed a deliverance. For it sets us clear of the obsession that we do not matter; bubbles on the stream of existence, we have no lasting purpose, and all our acts are the physical issue of the past, inevitably determined, which hangs over many like a cloud, and is the dogma of 'scientific fatalism.' True, this gospel of freedom brings with it also a sense of struggle and failure, and we know how hard it is to make ourselves. The gospel knocks us down; it bids us repent and be as little children and see our own unworthiness. But it lifts us higher than all others, for it tells us that on us, so weak and worthless, the grace of Christ is poured. It sets men's lives in shadow—but it is the shadow of the Cross.

¶ If at an auction of musical instruments a battered violin with dusty body and sagging strings had been bid for in cents as a worthless article; if some one should pick up the instrument, dust it, look at the maker's name, bid it up into the hundreds of dollars, and when pressed bid higher still; if word went round that the man was Kreisler, that Fritz Kreisler wanted the violin, no matter what it cost; how the estimate of the instrument's worth would rise! So Jesus put new value into despised men. Let the cost be the crown of thorns, the spear, the Cross: the Master counted personality, however ruined, worth it all.¹

4. This is the foundation of all true respect for human right, and contains the true theory of human equality. It is because they are sinners for whom Christ died that we cannot let men be treated as mere hands to be bought in the labour market, or natives to be exploited where white toilers would be dear. It is because they are brothers, the redeemed of the Lord, that we are moved to set an end to the scandals of our slums, our industrial diseases and our unemployment. More and more will it come about that men begin to discern the truth of St John's words, 'He that loveth God must love his brother also,' or that of St James about reality in love. More and more will it be seen what a mockery it is to talk of the Communion of Saints, unless we mean by it a great deal more than many people now think it means. More and more, too, will it appear that, apart

¹ H. E. Fosdick, *The Meaning of Service*, 53.

from that belief in human individuality and the transcendent value of man of which the gospel is the basis, all other schemes for amelioration are vain—vain on two grounds. First, apart from religion they have no driving force, and, secondly, apart from that belief, they will tend to slavery; they will arrange the outer life more comfortably; but, seeking to do it by regulation, and with no thought beyond, they will tend to treat the less fortunate classes, not as persons, but as things, to secure their external well-being, but to do so at the cost of their personality.

¶ A great business man who died lately began an address to his Association with the words, 'The true function of modern business is the making of men.' Jesus would go further, and say that the function of all social contacts is the creation of a society of friends. We are learning to-day that the true secret of success in business, as elsewhere, depends on the enriching of human values, on what makes for the construction of personality. It is coming home to us that all soulless work, work which treats men only as machines and never permits our sympathy to pass out through business contacts to kindle the sense of brotherhood, is a bad investment, even for the money we spend on it.¹

Modern Science and Religion

Is. lxii. 10.—'Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.'

It is not the business of the Church to teach science—or to refute it: its province is elsewhere. But it is the business of the Church to preach the gospel of deliverance to the captives, and to remove out of the way all stones and stumbling-blocks against their return. Science has indeed been the Nebuchadrezzar who has carried many away captive, but science to-day, it would seem, is being used by God as His servant Cyrus, to bring about the return of His exiles. It gives us a conception of the universe in which it is natural to believe in God; in fact, one may say that it is almost scientific to believe in the foundation principles of the Bible. 'As expounded by scientists like Eddington, it looks

¹ James Reid, *In Touch with Christ*, 191.

as though the new knowledge will help rather than hinder faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ,' says F. C. Bryan.¹ In the last generation the Church was not slow to express its fears at the findings of science, at the conclusions of materialism and evolution: let us not be silent when science stands on our side!

Now in what way is science helpful to, rather than a hindrance to, faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

1. *Modern Science supports a Spiritual Interpretation of the Universe.*—Right up to the end of last century the age of materialism in science reigned: everything was based upon the ultimate atom, hard and bullet-like, which was at the back of everything we could see or touch. The universe was like a great machine, and 'Lord Kelvin confessed that he could understand nothing of which he could not make a mechanical model.' But to-day all this has been changed. Professor Eddington tells us: 'The solid substance of things is an illusion. It is a fancy projected by the mind into the external world. We have chased the solid substance from the continuous liquid to the atom, from the atom to the electron, and there we have lost it. The stuff of this world is not matter, it is mind stuff.' Sir Oliver Lodge gives his opinion: 'We have concentrated too much upon matter. . . . The real fact is that we are in the midst of a spiritual world, which dominates the material.' Quotations such as these show us that the old materialism, which was such a barrier to some would-be believers in God, has gone, gone entirely, not to return: whatever explanation of the universe must ultimately be accepted, it is certain that it must be on spiritual lines. 'The things which are seen are temporal, and the things which are not seen are eternal.' This modern view of the universe does not, of course, prove the existence of God, but such a belief is certainly congruous with it.

2. *Modern Science believes in a Creation of the World.*—Einstein holds that the world is definitely finite—terribly immense, inconceivably great, yet finite none the less. He declares: 'the present matter of the universe cannot have existed for ever. . . . We are led to contemplate an event or continuous process

¹ *The New Knowledge and the Old Gospel*.

of creation at some time not infinitely remote. In some way, matter which had not previously existed, came or was brought into being.' He describes how millions of years ago the stars and the sun came into existence: then, how our earth was flung off as a globe of gas intensely hot from the sun, upon which, as it cooled, land and sea, and finally life appeared. Jeans suggests that if we want a picture of that creation we may think of the 'finger of God agitating the ether.' But the opening words of Genesis give us a more beautiful picture—and, this is the important point, one which scientifically can be held to-day: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' A creation certainly implies a Creator: and while science cannot identify that Creator with God, yet there is much in the modern scientific view that is in harmony with our conception of God. Sir James Jeans sums up his theory of the Creation in these telling words: 'These concepts reduce the whole universe to a world of light, potential or existent, so that the whole story of its creation can be told with perfect accuracy, and completeness, in the six words, "God said, Let there be light."'¹

3. *Science to-day allows more Room for God in the Universe.*—The older physics which held sway from the seventeenth century right up to the end of the nineteenth century, on account of its servitude to the theory of mechanical cause and effect, really allowed no room for God. It was deterministic. Everything had to follow certain laws. 'Miracles do not happen' was the unhesitating proclamation of science. Now Professor Eddington shows us that the laws which were thought to be causal are found on investigation to be statistical: for example, insurance societies can predict the percentage of people who will die at a certain age, but this does not say who will die at that age. They state the way deaths are observed to occur, not the way they *have* to occur. There something enters in which science cannot explain. Jeans puts it another way: he says that if two thousand atoms of radium were in a room, science can tell us that probably within a year one atom will disappear, that is, break up into its

constituent parts; but as to how that particular atom is selected, and the other one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine are left, science can say nothing. He says, 'fate comes and knocks at the door.' 'There may be some factor for which we have so far found no better name than fate, operating in nature to neutralize the cast-iron inevitability of the old law of causation.' But what if that unknown factor be God? There is now no scientific reason for bowing God out of His universe. Jeans sums it up: 'The picture of the universe presented by the new physics contains more room than did the old mechanical picture for life and consciousness to exist within the picture itself, together with the attributes which we commonly associate with them, such as free-will, and the capacity to make the universe in some small degree different by our presence.'

4. *Finally, Science is more Humble than Formerly.*—Scientists are not nearly so dogmatic as they used to be. They know so much that they realize how little they know. At any rate they are coming to conclusions which the Bible, through the leap of faith, came to years and years ago.

With this chastened mood of the scientist, together with his pronounced emphasis on the spiritual interpretation of the universe, we may thank God for the stones which are being taken out of the way of the would-be believer in Jesus Christ. The universe does in any case hold out a riddle for everybody. Dr Cairns has reminded us that 'Christianity professes to be a solution of that riddle. By abandoning it we do not therefore get rid of mystery and difficulty, but we greatly accentuate them.' H. G. Wells and Julian Huxley are entitled to have their own views, and they may say that they have scientific backing for them: but the important thing for us to note is that we also are entitled to have our own, and science to-day not only lays no stumbling-block in the way of faith, but rather helps and encourages it.

¹ *The Mysterious Universe*, 89.

Two Cities

Is. lxii. 10.—‘Go through, go through the gates.’

WHEN we read these words there rises before us the picture of two cities of the ancient world. They are cities entirely different in situation and in history, in character and in hope. The one was Babylon, and the other was Jerusalem.

The gates may have been those of Babylon, proud and wide and lofty gates. In the mighty metropolis on the Euphrates the men and women of Judah were living in exile. For a long time they had been there. At first their captivity had been utterly distasteful to them. They hated it. They could not sing the Lord's song in the strange land, but sat mute and silent and stricken. But the years ran on. A new generation grew up on the alien soil. Where the fathers and mothers had felt themselves in banishment and strangerhood, the sons and daughters formed close and congenial ties of friendship, of business, of imitation, and affinity. So the prophet, and the Lord behind the prophet, had to address a loud and reiterated command to them, a summons to depart about which there could be no mistake—‘Go through, go through the gates.’

Or the gates may have been those of Jerusalem, much smaller and less imposing, now blackened with fire and lying largely in wreckage and ruin, but with such august and holy memories clustering around them. Perhaps it was Jerusalem, not the place of departure but the place of aspiration and arrival, that the prophet intended when he spoke his imperative, ‘Go through, go through the gates.’

Babylon and Jerusalem have each their significance for ourselves. They are cities of the present as well as of the past. They are marked on the map of the spiritual world as plainly as on the maps of geographers and explorers.

1. So, first, there is Babylon. ‘Go through, go through the gates,’ cries the prophet. Accept the offer of freedom and a new life. The road is straight, and the passage is sure. Only pass through the gates and go out on the great adventure.

Now this is life, if ever there was a picture of it. We and our fathers have dwelt in the

city of slavery. We have become so used to it that we hardly know it to be the slavery it is. We have accepted the world and the world's conditions. But on to our lives God has flashed a great chance of freedom. No matter in what circumstances we are, God has offered us ‘a future and a hope.’ Jesus Christ has opened the city's gates, and there before us, calling, it is true, for some toil and hardship, lies a plain white road creeping over the desert like a ribbon, leading to liberty and new manhood. You would hardly think that the cry ‘Go through the gate’ was needed. You would imagine that each man, conscious of the slavery of his life, would be tumbling over his neighbour in the passion to be free. And yet the cry is as much needed by us as by the Israelites. Some of us are deterred by the friendships we have formed: some of us have really come to love this life as a kind of second nature: some of us have had our will and character so broken that we have not the resolution and power to struggle to our feet; and others, looking out on the white road and the surrounding desert, are afraid of the toil and agony that the long journey may entail.

¶ Dickens tells the story, in one of his novels,¹ of a French doctor who was imprisoned in the Bastille and there taught himself shoemaking. After twenty years he was released, but he had been a prisoner so long that liberty was frightening to him. So, to preserve him from doing harm to himself, he was locked up in a dark garret where he might feel safe and at home. ‘The garret, built to be a depository for firewood and the like, was dim and dark: for the window, of dormer shape, was in truth a door in the roof, with a little crane over it for the hoisting up of stores from the street: unglazed, and closing up the middle in two pieces, like any other door of French construction. To exclude the cold, one half of this door was fast closed, and the other was opened but a very little way. Such a scanty portion of light was admitted through these means, that it was difficult, on first coming in, to see anything; and long habit alone could have slowly formed in any one the ability to do any work requiring nicety in such obscurity. Yet, work of that kind was being done in the garret; for, with his back towards the door, and his face towards the window where the keeper of the wine-shop stood looking

¹ *A Tale of Two Cities*, 42.

at him, a white-haired man sat on a low bench, stooping forward and very busy, making shoes.'

Pass through the gates! Let no lower interest rob you of the dream of your full manhood and liberty in Jesus Christ. There is no gain here that can atone for the loss of your soul's freedom and life. The gates to the full, true life of manhood in God are open, thanks to Christ who broke each bar.

2. Over against Babylon there is Jerusalem. If Babylon is the place God commands us to leave, Jerusalem is the place He commands us to enter. We are not simply to approach it and to sit down within sight of its walls. We are to penetrate into it, to get to know it thoroughly, and to make our own its light and life, its sanctity and grace. But that is what many Christians are strangely reluctant and unwilling to do.

(1) Let us take the gate of *faith*. We have some real acquaintance with it, but the acquaintance is partial and broken. If our faith were simpler, steadier, fuller, we should be conscious of God's presence from morning to night, of Christ's redemption meeting our deepest and constantly recurring needs, of the Holy Spirit abiding always in the secret of our spirits. We should live and have our being not in the temporal and visible world nearly so much as in the world eternal and unseen. Our heart and brain move there; our feet stay here.

¶ 'I spent a night once with Westcott,' said one of his friends, 'and it seemed to me that he lived and moved and had his being in a higher region to which I now and then came as a stranger, and he could see habitually what I sometimes saw: the way of God in human life. We are meant to have our home in the higher world.'

(2) Let us take the gate of *surrender*. We bring our little gifts to God. We lay our paltry tribute at the pierced feet of Christ, who came to save us not through water but through blood. But there are few of us whose sacrifices on our Lord's behalf really cost us anything. Our time, our thought, our money, are so grudgingly bestowed. We look up at the gate of surrender; we admire it from a safe distance; but only one here and another there go through it.

¶ There are many people who say to our Lord: *I yield myself wholly to Thee without*

reserve; but there are very few who practise this abandonment.¹

¶ 'I had gone a-begging from door to door . . . when Thy golden chariot appeared . . . and I wondered who was this King of all kings! My hopes were high and methought my evil days were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth . . . to be scattered. The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and Thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden Thou didst hold out Thy right hand and say: "What hast thou to give to Me?" Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open Thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided and then from my wallet I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to Thee. But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my bag to find a least little grain of gold. I bitterly wept, and wished that I had given Thee my all.'

(3) Let us take the gate of *joy*. 'Put sadness away from thee,' an old Christian writing of the second century counsels its readers. To a certain extent we obey the counsel, but our joy is not so radiant and so conquering and so contagious as that of Christ's redeemed should be. It would be completer if our faith were brighter and our surrender more unreserved.

¶ Professor L. P. Jacks writes of Stopford Brooke: 'Between him and joy there was an irresistible affinity, and even in circumstances the most depressing he could find for himself a sunny nook, and reflect the sunshine on those about him.'

(4) And let us take the gate of *power*. In the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the strength of the Holy Ghost, the disciple is baptized with heavenly power. He answers the questions of bewildered men. He heals the diseases of a sick and dying world. Eyes rekindling and prayers follow his steps as he goes. So it should be with each of us who has tasted for himself that the Lord is gracious. But most of us are feeble and ineffectual. What we need is to go through the gates of Jerusalem, to possess our possessions, and to be Christians not in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth.

¹ St Francis de Sales.

Stumbling-Blocks

Is. lxii. 10.—‘Gather out the stones.’

EASTERN governments have never realized the value of permanent good roads. In the days of the Prophet, as indeed is the case under Far Eastern rule to-day, whenever there was to be some great procession or some royal progress all haste had to be made to prepare the worn, deep-rutted, dusty, stony track for the traffic of the important day. An army of workmen was sent out to prepare the way, to fill up the hollows, to make level the hillocks, to drain the pools or to gather out the stones which wound and weary the tender feet.

For this preparation God’s herald cries for men to go before who shall take out of the way every stumbling-block, everything that can discourage or wound those who have set their faces to return to their God.

1. ‘Gather out the stones.’ That is the duty of each one of us who ventures to take on himself the name of Christ.

It is not always easy to respond to the call. Gathering stones out of the way while others are proudly keeping step in the advancing procession sometimes seems dull and unreasonable work. ‘Why may we not simply be pilgrims? Why must we, who have already set our face in the right direction, worry ourselves to increase the comfort or to ensure the perseverance of others?’

Because a new spirit came into the world when God revealed Himself. When the first murderer heard the voice of conscience, he answered, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ But it was a murderer who said it, and the blood of his victim cried out against him. All the lessons which God in the Old Testament gave to that little Chosen People were to teach the duties of brotherhood. In his tiny area of farmstead and vineyard the Israelite was taught that if he saw his brother’s ox or ass astray he might not go his own way; he must in any case take the strayed beast and keep it for his brother. ‘Thou mayest not hide thyself,’ spake the Law of Moses. And Jesus Christ lifted up out of the limited realm of rustic agriculture the duty of self-sacrifice, and set the Golden Rule for ever in the light of His approval for

the teaching of the world. That is to say, there is no such thing as an inert Christianity. As long as there are any difficulties in the road we have not only to walk along the road ourselves, but to look for the stones and take them out of the way of others.

The claim of God’s Fatherhood and our Saviour’s Brotherhood on us is to be keen of soul to see the special stone that will cut our neighbour’s tender feet and swift and wise to take it away. Nor can we plead that it is sheer folly to be offended by such things. Our strength cannot be disdainful of the unreasonable fancies of a weakling. Christ, while we were yet sinners, unlovely weaklings, came and died for us. How terrible is His utterance to him who, instead of helping, casts a stumbling-block in the way of a soul! ‘It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depth of the sea.’

¶ In the early Councils of the Church there often was a band of men with scarred faces, twisted bodies, blinded eyes, maimed limbs. These entered the Council Chamber first, and their words were listened to with greatest honour. Why? They were the victims of the Diocletian persecution, and by their scars they had won the freedom of their unmaimed fellows. And ever at their head the Church saw One whose hands and feet and side were wounded, One marred more than any man.

2. In the Prophet’s days the gathering out of the stones was a very temporary process, and speedily the roads reverted to their old condition of morass or desert sand. But Western skill has found a new use for the stones. Now we gather them out, then crush them, and finally, out of the crushed and conquered stones, we make the basis for the firm and smooth surface along which the carriage wheels of kings and the hurrying feet of children may go unhindered.

There is no firmer foothold for a forgiven sinner than the crushed temptations of the past; no smoother road for the resolute penitent than the sins which the power of Christ has overcome. Our Saviour, when He sets us to gather out the stones from the road for our younger or weaker brethren, by His Holy Spirit not only saves from the wound, but gives afresh the power to go upon the way rejoicing. We rejoice to be the permanent roadmakers of our God.

3. And how is it all to be done? There is only one way, only one lesson with which every word of God ends.

We remember how one morning certain women were going with loving, bruised hearts to tend a body whose death meant despair to them. 'Oh,' said they, 'who shall roll away the stone for us?' and the gloom was even deeper than before. But when they reached the tomb, lo! the stone *was* rolled away. And when the stone was gone, they saw—no death, but an empty tomb, and a vision of angels, and, when they turned, a Living Lord. And life had a new power ever after.

That is the great stone to be gathered out of the road, the stone that hides the fact that Jesus Christ is alive to-day. How wonderful is the joy of rolling away that stone from the pathway of any soul, the joy of bringing a heart to the living Christ! It is He always, He everywhere. And at last, when we stand before that Throne, where the results of life are made clear, what a joy to hear, as we look on some whom we have helped, that it is He again: 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me.'

This Gospel I uphold, the one

The latter Adam comes to prove;

To every soul beneath the sun

Wide open lies a heaven of love;

But none, however free from sin,

However cloth'd in pomp and pride,

However fair, may enter in,

Without some witness at his side,

To attest before the Judge and King

Vicarious love and suffering.

Who stands alone, shall surely fall;

Who folds the falling to his breast,

Stands sure and firm in spite of all,

While angel choirs proclaim him blest.¹

The Christian's Reward

Is. lxii. 11.—'His reward is with him, and his work before him.'

THIS sentence arrests us by its unusual phrasing. If the prophet had written 'His work is with him, and his reward before him,' the meaning would be simple. For we all know by daily experience that our work is with us, often too

¹ Robert Buchanan.

much with us. And we all anticipate, sooner or later, some kind of payment for our toil: we look forward to future compensation for this present weariness, we trust that if we sow in tears we shall reap in joy. The words, as they stand, however, appear like a paradox. Yet paradox is no uncommon form to express the secrets of God. Perhaps every deep spiritual truth involves in itself a reconciliation of opposites, a harmony of apparent contradictions. And so, we may take these words as suggesting two neglected aspects of Christian service—its recompense, which is always present; and its scope and horizon, which go on widening and expanding for ever.

1. There is a zest in struggle, an ardour in exertion, a glow in achievement, belonging to all healthy human activity. The scholar who scorns delights and lives laborious days; the athlete who steadily trains himself to excel; the explorer who adventures across uncharted deserts; the craftsman who strives to outstrip his rivals in workmanship—each discovers in a real sense that his reward is with him. The man who carries a hard business well through finds a joy in battling with the very hardships which he conquers, apart from any other prize.

Human nature yields these recompenses of its own; but in deeper and truer fashion Christ's disciples realize that their reward is with them. People sometimes ask cynically, 'Does it pay to be a Christian?' Before we answer, we must ask the further question, 'In what kind of coinage are you reckoning payment?' Our Lord warns His servants, 'Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.' Yet they have their reward. When we try to take stock of the careers of devoted disciples it does not always appear that visible success is with them. Often Christ has claimed them for service which was passive rather than active; often they are elected not to achieve but only to endure. Moreover, it is part of the mystery of the Kingdom of God that His servants' labour bears hidden fruit and its results reach far beyond our sight. Nevertheless, the beatitudes of Jesus are all spoken in the present tense; and to loyal souls those beatitudes are constantly coming true.

Some of us have tried to obey our Lord's command, 'Feed my lambs.' We have given ourselves to the service of Christ's little ones.

And we have proved how that service can be a sacrament as well, because it reveals the Real Presence, and becomes a channel of Divine grace to our own souls. Many a Sunday-school teacher will confess thankfully, 'It was good for me to be there, in that dingy classroom. For there, without my knowing it, were built three tabernacles—one for me, and one for the children, and one for Him who is the Friend of all children and the Teacher of all teachers.'

The men who quietly renounce worldly ambitions for the sake of doing good, the men who steadily refuse to get rich at the expense of honesty and honour, the men who suffer reproach and loss for their loyalty to some unpopular cause which is the cause of conscience—their reward is with them. Deep in their own spirits they inherit that peace which passeth all understanding and that love which passeth all knowledge.

Those Christians who serve as pioneers of the gospel in distant lands are seldom permitted to gain any shining outward success, or to reap golden harvests from their patient sowing. Yet, though they wear out their lives at some lonely mission-station, we dare not pity them. Surely they have their reward—that reward which Thomas Aquinas summed up when he said: *Non aliam mercedem, Domine, nisi Te*—'Grant me, O Lord, no other recompense except Thyself.' Christ is their all-sufficient reward for all they suffer and surrender, all they lose and let go and leave behind for His Name's sake. To the whole fellowship of companions in the faith and patience of Jesus Christ, this great promise is fulfilled. Our reward is with us, if only we be patient and faithful.

¶ For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paid back as a small part of a great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.¹

¹ David Livingstone.

2. Not less commanding is the corresponding truth: 'his work is before him.' Every real student finds that saying verified in the course of his studies. Because the more he learns the more conscious he grows of his ignorance, and the more aware he becomes of vast provinces and kingdoms of knowledge waiting to be explored and possessed. This is why great scholars are generally so humble-minded. At the end of a long life the wisest man will confess that he has only begun to find out how much there still remains for him to learn.

If this principle comes home to students in the university of the world, much more is it fulfilled in the experience of a Christian. His work is perpetually before him: and it always must be so, from the nature of his reward. The Jewish rabbis used to say that every duty accomplished is rewarded by a wider duty to perform. And so part of the prize which recompenses our service of Christ is the power and the opportunity to serve Him better still. Our Lord cheered His apostle lying in captivity with this strange promise: 'As thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.' The reward for work done is more work and sterner work to do. And the wages of going on in that work mean that we become more and more entangled in the sacred task, and more fascinated by its interests, and more sensitive to its claims. To His veteran disciples the service of Christ grows more absorbing and more exacting year by year. They who enter into the secrets of that service perceive how, as God's enterprise advances, it must correspondingly expand. Thus the oldest missionaries discern most clearly what great things the propaganda of faith entails and demands; while, after so many centuries of labour and intercession and sacrifice, the Church to-day confesses more ardently than ever that its work lies before it, not behind.

Our work will be before us eternally. Those who live as fellow-labourers with their Lord on earth may humbly hope for some share in the endless activities of heaven. The servant who is faithful over a few things here shall be made ruler over many things at last: and that surely means that he shall enter on a career of more joyful, because more strenuous and more sacrificial, service. Sometimes Christians are reproached for having respect to the recompense of their reward hereafter. We are told that

even to think about heaven is selfish. But how does Christ reward a man for lofty self-forgetfulness? By enabling that man to forget himself continually, more and more: *that* is the reward. So our Christian hope, which maketh not ashamed, is the hope that God's grace will make us in the end what we have been all our lives praying and striving to become: it is the hope that even we shall be made altogether humble and entirely generous and perfectly unselfish at last.

¶ Christ to me is the justification and inspiration to keep my body and mind fit and perfect that thereby I may preserve myself, my soul, fit to accomplish, able to serve, and confident I shall hear over there, not 'you are loosed from the wheel of life, you can now enjoy forgetfulness' but 'well done, here are more talents for you, and more victories to win. Enter into that kind of joy which is the joy of your Lord.'¹

The Conqueror from Edom

Is. lxiii. 1.—'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?'

'It was a serious misapprehension of the spirit of the prophecy,' says the modern commentator, 'which led many of the Fathers to apply this prophecy to the passion and death of Christ. Although certain phrases, detached from their context, may suggest that interpretation to a Christian reader, there can be no doubt that the scene depicted is a "drama of Divine Vengeance," into which the idea of propitiation does not enter.' And the commentator is right. But Christ is in it after all.

1. Edom and Israel were enemies of old. Edom is Esau and Israel is Jacob, and they strove ere they left the womb; they maintained their strife all the days of their existence. Then there came a day when the strife reached its climax. When Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar the Edomites took part in the destruction. They gathered their ancient enmity into one sweeping merciless blow, and when the city fell they raised a shout of exultation. The Israelites were carried captive, and the Edomites lined the way and mocked them

as they passed to the land of their captivity. Will Israel forgive this act? Listen to the prophet Obadiah: 'In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his substance, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. . . . As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head.' And we read in the Hundred and Thirty-seventh Psalm: 'Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.' No, Israel neither forgave nor forgot.

So, one day, this prophet had a vision. Looking out from Jerusalem he saw a conqueror return from the direction of Edom, from Bozrah its capital. He accosted him: 'Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel?' The answer is terrible in its strength, in its vindictiveness: 'I trod them in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury; and their life-blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment.' Israel has had her revenge; the day of vengeance upon Edom has come.

How did the prophet know that Edom would suffer? Certainly the vision came before the fact. He saw the blood-stained conqueror return from Bozrah while the chief city of the Edomites was still dwelling in insolent security. He had a vision, we say. But what is a vision?

He knew that there is a righteous God in the earth. What was it that separated Israel from the nations of the earth? It was the knowledge that there is a righteous God. Other nations knew that there were gods, and that it was possible to play off one god against another; Israel knew that there is one only living and true God, that He is the God of the whole earth, and that He doeth righteousness continually. It was the prophet's absorbing, victorious belief in a righteous God that gave him his vision.

2. There are three things in the vision. First, that there is revenge on earth for every wrong; second, that the vengeance is obtained by the self-sacrifice of the person who has been wronged; third, that the avenger must suffer alone.

(1) *There is revenge for every wrong that has*

¹ W. T. Grenfell, *What Christ Means to Me*, 94.

ever been done.—Why did the prophet see the blood-stained conqueror come from Edom? Because Edom had exulted over Israel in the day of her calamity, and he knew that Israel would one day be amply avenged of that wrong. He knew it because there is a God in this earth that doeth righteously. Browning knew it also when he wrote, 'God's in his heaven—All's right with the world!' We scoff at the poet when we are smarting under some wrong. The creed of the optimist, we say; the purr of the well-to-do citizen of the middle-class! Do we not know, then, that God is in His heaven and that every wrong will be avenged? Even the Psalmists of Israel knew that:

The Lord executeth righteous acts,
And judgments for all that are oppressed.
He made known His ways unto Moses,
His doings unto the children of Israel.

God has the power and exercises it. What a revolution it makes in a man's life when he discovers this. God righteous judgment executes for all that are oppressed!

(2) *The revenge is obtained by the self-sacrifice of the wronged.*—The prophet did not know that. This is where the Fathers were mistaken in their interpretation of the prophecy. They thought that he knew that the wrong was avenged by the person that suffered it. Ah, no! There is progress in the doctrine of revenge. It has to be admitted, however reluctantly, that the conqueror whom the prophet saw return from Edom was stained, not with his own blood, but with that of the Edomites. He saw that there was revenge, but he did not see that the vengeance was obtained at the cost of the conqueror's own life-blood. It is not to be denied that he had the sense of vicarious suffering. But that is not the same. No one knew till the Lord Jesus Christ came that God's method of obtaining vengeance on His enemies was to die for them. No one knew that that is the only way for men.

There cannot be another way. God Himself has told us so, for if there had been another way He certainly would not have taken this way. But history has told us also. Was there ever revenge got by making the guilty suffer? Were the ancient clan-feuds ended so? We may not have learned the lesson fully yet. It

is so great a lesson to learn; there is no greater or more blessed lesson to be learned on earth. Have we learned it as nations? Was there not the wildest mafficking in Rome when the news reached it that Adowa had at last been taken and the old defeat avenged?

¶ There were those who felt it would have been nobler for Lord Roberts, on that day that he telegraphed the news of Cronje's surrender, if he had not reminded us that it had taken place on the anniversary of Majuba.

(3) *The loneliness of the avenger is a prominent matter in the vision.*—'The keynote of the piece,' says Sir George Adam Smith, 'is the loneliness of the Hero.' And all Christendom has noticed this. Where are the words that have carried more sorrow to the Christian heart than these: 'I have trodden the wine-press alone'? The commentators say that the solitary Avenger is not the Lamb of Calvary, but Jehovah the God of Israel, obtaining Divine vengeance for His chosen people. But the heart of Christendom has not been wholly wrong. The Avenger of guilty man must also tread the wine-press alone. Even the man who has suffered wrong must go out and obtain his revenge alone. Of the people there can be none with him.

Who is there who can stand out among his fellows and reconcile them to God? The wronged must be his own Avenger, and it is always, 'Gainst thee, thee only, have I sinned.' If God has suffered the wrong, none but God can obtain revenge for it. And it is so between man and man. No one can pay the price that will reconcile to you the man who has done you wrong. You, too, must tread the wine-press alone. So 'when thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that *thou hast aught against thy brother*, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' But we have not touched the heart of the matter yet. What is this loneliness? It is the loneliness of the soul that craves for sympathy. Did we think that the loneliness of the Conqueror consisted simply in His solitary grandeur? 'A striking majestic figure!' What is a striking majestic solitary figure to us! It is a God who longs for human sympathy, for human love, that we need. That is the wrong we had done Him—we had withheld our love from Him. We had done

Him, we could do Him, no other wrong than that. He came to get back our love. He came to Calvary for no other end than that. And, of course, He came alone. Until He suffers and in suffering has His revenge upon us, until by His solitary sacrifice He wins back our love, He cannot but be alone. But He is not proud of His loneliness. Listen to Him at the Supper: 'I will not drink of the fruit of this vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom,' and yet 'with desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.' In the Garden He is only a stone's throw away from His disciples, but He must be alone. And yet He returns to them, returns to them again and again, and gently chides them, 'What, could ye not watch with me one hour?'

Until He wins our love He must be alone. We have not yet sounded the depth of distress in the words of Edom's conqueror, 'I have trodden the wine-press alone.' There is no sorrow like unto this sorrow.

O Thou, that from eternity
Upon thy wounded heart hast borne
Each pang and cry of misery
Wherewith our human hearts are torn,

Thy love upon the grievous cross
Doth glow, the beacon light of time;
Forever sharing pain and loss
With every man in every clime.

How vast, how vast thy sacrifice,
As ages come and ages go,
Still waiting till it shall suffice
To draw the last cold heart and slow!

The Angel of His Presence

Is. lxiii. 9.—'In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved him.'

THE phrase, 'the angel of his presence,' need not confuse us, as if some agent of God's will, and not God, is meant. The 'angel' was not a mere messenger from God, but, as in other Scriptures, God's own Presence, God Himself; and so interpreted, the phrase falls into line with the rest of the verse, which is one of the most vivid expressions that the Bible contains of the personality of God.

The prophet is looking backward over the tribulations and distresses of Israel, and as he surveys the long story of trouble and suffering he sees God's presence shining through it all, like the face of a friend. In the joy of this vision he speaks for God. 'In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.'

1. Now surely this means, first of all, a gracious, friendly, loving, sympathizing presence. God is with us in our troubles, not merely because He has to be there, since He is everywhere. He is there because He wants to be. Just as truly as we desire to be near our friends, our children, when they suffer, just so truly does God desire and choose to be near us in our afflictions. He is not present as a mere spectator, looking at us curiously while we suffer. That cold and distant conception of Him as the great onlooker,

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,

is not the thought of the Bible. He is with us as one who has the deepest interest in it all, feels all that happens to us, cares infinitely for us through it all.

Do we say that it is hard to think of God as thus entering into our afflictions? Yes, it is hard. And yet there were men even before Christ came, as the text proves, who rose to the nobility of that thought of a sympathizing God who suffers with us. And if we believe that God revealed Himself in Christ to draw unto Himself, then surely it ought to be possible for us to lay firm hold upon the thought of the Divine sympathy.

What sorrow is equal to His sorrow? Do we think His tears at the grave of Lazarus did not come from the heart? Though He knew all—resurrection, immortality, heaven—yet Jesus wept at the sadness of death. Do we think His tears over Jerusalem did not come from the heart? Though He knew all—the victory of His atoning death, the triumph of His faith—yet Jesus wept over the sufferings of men. Do we think the drops of blood in the Garden did not come from the heart? Though He knew all—the merit of His sacrifice, the joy of His reward, the glory of His Kingdom—yet the soul of Jesus was exceeding sorrowful even unto

death. When we look on Jesus Christ as the revealer of the heart of God, what affliction of our mortal life is there into which it does not bring God as our fellow-sufferer?

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not by;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

O! He gives to us His joy
That our grief He may destroy;
Till our grief is fled and gone
He doth sit by us and moan.¹

2. If this is how we are to think of the presence of God in our lives, as a personal, sympathizing, loving presence, pledged to us for all times and all possible occasions, it ought to be easy for us to see how it will save us. The power of such a thought of God always with us, and most of all in our times of weakness and trial and trouble, must be a redeeming, delivering, upholding power.

(1) It must save us, first of all, from the sense of meanness, littleness, unworthiness which embitters life and makes sorrow doubly hard to bear. The presence of God must bring a sense of dignity, of elevation, into our existence. It was a great king who once said, 'Where I sleep, there is the palace.' The life that has the presence of God in it can be neither trivial nor unworthy.

If God can come into this life of ours we ought to think well of it. All its daily duties, all its small delights—for there is no life so narrow that it has not room for the spirit of joy—should seem to us refined and uplifted by the Divine participation in them. Let us get out of the false notion that the only way to be dignified is to be distinguished, the only way to be good is to be heroic, the only way to help the world is to make a sensation, the only way to serve Christ is to do something big. Let us learn that the whole Christian life, whether it is lived on a scale of miles or of inches, is a beautiful and worthy life, and that what God requires of us is not to accomplish anything wonderful, but to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God. God has two thrones—one in the highest heaven, one in the lowliest heart.

¹ William Blake.

(2) The angel of God's presence saves us also from that reckless feeling of indifference which sometimes tempts us to let our lives go blundering and stumbling along on the lower levels. It brings a new conscience into our thoughts, desires, and efforts, awakes a noble dissatisfaction with our half-hearted work, quickens within us a longing to be more fit for the Divine companionship.

It is one mark of a good friend that he makes us wish to be at our best while we are with him. Those who have this influence are made in the likeness of that heavenly Friend whose presence is at once a stimulus and a help to purity of heart and nobleness of life. A man's reputation is what his fellow-men think of him. A man's character is what God knows of him. When we feel that the angel of His presence is with us, a careless life, a superficial life, no longer satisfies us. We long to be pure in heart, strong in purpose, clean in deed, because we know that nothing else will satisfy Him.

But if I be dear to some one else,

Then I should be to myself more dear.

Shall I not take care of all that I think,

Yea ev'n of wretched meat and drink,

If I be dear,

If I be dear to some one else? ¹

(3) God's presence saves us from the sense of weakness, ignorance, incompetence, which often overwhelms us in the sorrows of life. We feel not only that we are powerless to protect ourselves against trouble, but that we are not able to get the good out of it that ought to come to us. We cannot interpret our sorrows aright. We cannot see the real meaning of them. We cannot reach our hand through the years to catch 'the far-off interest of tears.' We say to ourselves in despair, 'God only knows what it means.' And if we do not believe that God is with us, then that thought shuts us up in the darkness, puts the interpretation of the mystery far away from us, locks us up in the prison house of sorrow and leaves the key in heaven. But if we believe that God is with us, then the word of despair becomes a word of hope.

This is what He says to us in Christ: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.'

¹ Tennyson, *Maud*, xv.

Yes, sorrow is real, sorrow is bitter, but *sorrow with God* is the path that leads to the larger, richer life.

¶ Every mercy that I could desire in the way of alleviation during the illness, and of sympathy, when at last the blow fell (the death of his first wife Ellen Penelope French), was ministered to me abundantly. Nor did He fail me, who laid this burthen upon me. No period in my life was more rich in experience of communion with God, and of the healing power of His Word; none more fruitful in the great task of the winning of souls.¹

Long since a shadow came and stood
Beside my bed,
Adrape in mystery and pain
From foot to head.
In vain I strove to drive it forth,
Without relief.
At last, 'O Christ,' I whispered low,
'Take Thou this grief.'
The shadow flitted not nor passed,
But now I trace
Through fast dissolving mists of doubt,
My Saviour's face.

(4) The thought of God's presence saves us from the sense of loneliness, which is unbearable. Companionship is essential to happiness. The deepest of all miseries is the sense of absolute isolation. There are moments in the experience of most of us when the mysterious consciousness of the law which made all human souls separate, like islands,

And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea,

fills us with heaviness of heart. In this painful solitude the present friendship of God is the only sure consolation. Nothing can divide us from Him—not misunderstanding, or coldness, or selfishness, or scorn—for none of these things is possible to Him. Nothing can divide us from Him except our own sin, and that He has forgiven and taken away and blotted out by His great mercy in Christ.

The Impatience of a Prophet

Is. lxiv. 1.—'Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down.'

HERE we have the impatience of a prophet. The visions the prophets saw so vividly made them impatient to have them realized. The contrast between the ideal and the actual was so violent that they could not bear it. It might also be said that their impatience was due to the intensity of their belief. They firmly believed that what they saw in vision and spoke in prophecy must have fulfilment. Nothing was too good to be true; nothing is in the moral and spiritual life. But not all at once does the ideal flash out in finished splendour. Little change can come in outward conditions, in social relationships, until first there is a change within the hearts of men. Outward conditions are what they are because of selfishness, greed, and inhumanity. There must be a new order of men before there can be a new order of society. That is the Bible view. 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the revealing of the sons of God.' When they appear the intolerable, outward conditions will begin to change, the groaning and travailing will begin to cease. Not all at once. We do not believe in quick and easy and wholesale methods of social and spiritual re-adjustment. The trouble of the world has its roots in individual self-will, and we know how deep down they go.

¶ In *Theologia Germanica*, a mystical book which dates back to the fourteenth century, we find: 'Nothing burneth in hell but self-will. Therefore it hath been said, "Put off thine own will and there will be no hell."' So long as there is any self-will, there will never be true love, true peace, true rest.

1. There is no quick or easy or dramatic way out of the difficulty. The prophet certainly hoped there was, and hope deferred made the prophet impatient. It was hard for him, for he stood alone, and he did want to vindicate God in the eyes of His enemies. He wanted to see them utterly confounded and rendered impotent. We know the feeling so well. Our zeal outruns our charity. And we are not always disinterested in our desire to see God vindicated. Other motives than jealousy for Jesus were behind the

² E. A. Knox, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian*, 153.

impatience of James and John with the Samaritans. They wanted God to rend the heavens and to come down in judgment upon a people they hated and would be glad to see the last of. The prophet had this, at least, to justify his impatience: he had seen a vision of what might be if all the forces of evil were finally destroyed. Then would come the wonderful transformation, a picture of which he gives us in the next chapter—the new heavens and the new earth, life reconstructed and organized, on the basis of joy. If only God would bring it to pass quickly, dramatically! But that is not God's way.

¶ God does not conduct His rivers, like arrows, to the sea. The ruler and compass are only for finite mortals who labour, by taking thought, to overcome their limitations, and are not for the Infinite mind. The expedition demanded by man's small power and short day produces the canal, but Nature, with a beneficent and picturesque circumambulancy, the work of a more spacious and less precipitate mind, produces the river. Why should we assume that, in all the rest of His ways, He rejoices in the river, but in religion can use no adequate method save the canal? . . . The question is whether God ever does override the human spirit in that direct way, and whether we ought to conceive either of His spirit or of ours after a fashion that could make it possible. . . . The long sorrowful experience of the ages seems to show that the last thing God thinks of doing is to drive mankind with resistless rein on the highway of righteousness.¹

It was because the prophet was all out for God and for His interests that he was impatient with His inaction. But can it be said that the majority of people now are all out for God's interests? They would like to see a change in the present condition of things, but they may be thinking less of God's interests than of their own. Long ago Jesus said, only we do not take Him seriously: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' It is certainly true that unless we are ready wholeheartedly to identify ourselves with God's interests, He will take no action. Carlyle once complained that 'He does nothing.' Even if it were true, what is there for Him to do in a world from which He is practically excluded? What difference

would it make if He did rend the heavens and come down? People said to Jesus as He hung on the Cross, 'Come down from the cross, and we will believe.' It would have made no difference. Belief of that sort has no moral value.

But is it true that God does nothing? Jesus did not think so. 'My Father worketh even until now, and I work.' Until we come on to a basis of absolute obedience, we cannot know what God is doing, or what He wants us to do. When we do surrender ourselves we are kept busy with real things, doing God's work, the work Christ did while on earth, changing human lives, bringing nearer the time when the world will acknowledge Him as King. But such a change comes slowly, not in mass movements; though that is not impossible. Pentecost was a mass movement, though it happened only once. The Reformation was a mass movement, though it was not wholly spiritual. Most Christians would wish to see anything happen that would bring about revival on a wide scale, and because it is delayed the earnest and impatient try to bring it about, to organize enthusiasm. All such attempts will fail. It is important that what is written or spoken of any spiritual movement should correspond closely with the facts. Testimony should never go an inch beyond experience.

2. 'Oh, that thou would'st rend the heavens and come down.' Are we quite sure we would like it if He did? Not unless we loved Him so much and wanted Him so much that we would not mind the manner of His coming. We never can tell how religious people will react to the impact of a real experience of God. So long as things are conventional and orderly and safe religion is a comforting addition to life. But, when it comes as an unwelcome and dangerous intrusion, piercing like a sword through every false peace and illegitimate joy, we resent its encroachment.

¶ In a book by Winston Churchill, *The Inside of the Cup*, published a number of years ago, there is a picture of conventional religion. Take this sentence, for example: 'Mr Plimpton did not want to see the world changed.' He was a churchwarden; he was also head of a not-too-reputable Trust Company. Of the comfort-loving members of St John's, and their attitude towards revival, the author says, 'They feel intuitively that Christianity

¹ John Oman, *Grace and Personality*.

contains a vital spark which, if allowed to fly, would start a conflagration beyond their control.'

Let God but keep His distance, and all will be well. The trouble is when He rends the sky of our untroubled peace and comes down. We have given Him His place, with a day all to Himself, in which we have been adoring Him with psalms and hymns and giving Him the go-by for the rest of the week. That was not how Jesus worshipped God or glorified His name. He worshipped Him in the beauty of holiness. He gave Him the gold of obedience. 'To do Thy will, O God, I take delight.' That was the spirit of His worship. It took Him to the Cross. There, on the Cross, He was lifted up to die, and He refused to come down until He had finished the work He had been given to do. There we see God glorified, we see 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' That is the meaning of all worship, 'to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.' But unless the Cross is at the very heart of all our worship, we can never glorify God, or lift up Christ that men may be drawn to Him.

Ruskin once poured scorn on our use of the term 'Divine service,' as if it could possibly mean what Christ wanted at our hands; or as if He could possibly be satisfied with that alone. A Church service may and does help to prepare us for the real Divine service, which may be the doing of God's will in some hard and painful and humiliating task. It is only as we are prepared to find God in every event and detail of daily duty, in every call to help at cost to ourselves, that God will rend the heavens of conventional worship and come down, in order that He may become real, may be seen and known, revered and loved.

Something of this kind Bernard Shaw has said—that we have never taken Christ as a real Person, who means what He says, 'a force like electricity,' which can be set to work with revolutionary effect. He has been but a picture in a frame, a statue on a pedestal. If only we would let Him come down! We may dispute this or resent it but is there any truth in it? It is something we must each put to the test of experience. Have we ever asked ourselves the question? Why is it that with all the public worship of Jesus there is to-day, there is so little of the Christ spirit manifest in the public life of the world, in the solution of its moral, social,

political and race problems? If it meant anything real, men and women would be moved to take action, heroic action, and do things for Christ. That is, after all, the test by which the world judges the value of anything.

¶ I wonder how we must appear to those who watch us and hear us making our brave assertions about the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and our personal devotion to the Lord Christ. I wonder if we do not seem to them like Alpine climbers who, having greased their faces and covered them with masks, and having put on their nailed boots and taken ice-axes in their hands, then proceed to walk gravely up the mild heights of Ludgate Hill? The contrast between our profession and our achievement would be ludicrous if it were not so utterly pathetic.¹

When you see a man acting contrary to natural inclination, doing things that some of you would rather be dead than do, no longer thinking about pleasure or money or sex—things that used to fill practically the whole horizon of his thought—but spending his spare time helping others to get right with God and straight with their fellows, you begin to see that there is something here that calls for real heroism. Such heroic action is not in the nature of 'stunt' exploits for all the world to see and applaud. It is the normal expression of the absolutely surrendered life; so normal and natural does it seem, this quality of life, that it calls for no remark. Or when we see the stubborn barriers of race and rancour, of colour and creed being miraculously overcome, and men who had nothing in common being brought together in a fellowship that is real and satisfying, we know that God has rent the heavens of all make-believe unity and false peace, and conventional religion, and has come down in living reality to dwell with men, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God.

Autumn Leaves

Is. lxiv. 6.—'We all do fade as a leaf.'

1. THERE is something in words like these which we instinctively *resent*. We feel that though they remind us of the serious fact that we must

¹ H. R. L. Sheppard, *The Impatience of a Parson*, 146.

all pass on from youth through manhood to old age, yet there is more to be said of man than these words contain. What we resent and protest against is the idea that the life of a man can be compared to anything. We believe instinctively—and our instinct in this matter has been fed by the faith of all the ages—that man is apart from and superior to all the creatures of God, that he is solitary and unique, that he and anything else in the world of Nature are never to be mentioned in the same breath. Our whole human life—its faith and patience, its wonderful loyalty to difficult ideals through much pain and in a dimly-lighted world—rests upon a conviction, so profound as to be really an element in man's personality, that he differs from all created things, that what applies to them for that very reason does not apply to him, that in no final sense can there be natural law in the spiritual world.

Take, for example, this saying: 'We all do fade as a leaf.' It is true that a human life passes through the stages of growth, maturity, and decay. And it would help us to feel the seriousness and pathos of our human life were we to walk through a wood in the late autumn days, through bare trees and over fallen leaves. It would do us good to get away from the details of our ordinary life, and to face the inevitable facts which have such a power to simplify things. It might help us back into the narrow way where we come upon God were we to do anything which might set us even for a moment in the midst of spacious surroundings and under the rebuke of the stars.

But the fallen, faded leaves impress us and lift up the Everlasting Doors, admitting God—not because we feel that we are like those leaves, but because we feel that we are not altogether like them. We take suggestions from the faded leaves, but we do not suffer them to drive home the dismal idea that we also are leaves. There would be no pathos, no searchings of our hearts as we trod over faded leaves, if we really thought that we were altogether like them. It is because we are like them, and yet not like them, that they arouse in our hearts this ache of thought, of fear and hope, which is composed only by that confidence in God which Jesus Christ achieved amid the actual facts of life, and which He offers to us, in order that we may overcome the disabling innuendo which rises from the sense of our mortal frailty, and

chase from our souls the dreary argument of death.

Let us take to ourselves the simple lessons which come home to every sincere and unspoiled mind, as often as we look upon bare trees and remind ourselves that 'we all do fade as a leaf.'

2. The leaf in its fading, how lovely it may be! It is in autumn days that the leaves of many trees charm us most—the warm red and russet and yellow of their colouring. Where did all that beauty come from which the leaf discovers to us when it comes to die? Those who know tell us that that wonderful colouring which the dying leaf puts on was always lurking in the leaf. It did not come into the leaf in the dying days; it only came out of the leaf then. It was there all the time, though it needed the touch of death to make it plain to us. In that beauty of the dying leaf we see the leaf giving back to the world the light of all the days that are past. While it was yet a bud, and afterwards through all its prime, the leaf was lying open to the sun and to the sky. Through all those days it was catching and secreting the light and glory of the heavens. And now, when life is ebbing from its veins, when the inmost thing must be exposed, we see the unsuspected beauty of its soul, the treasure it had garnered through all the days and nights, from the strong sun, and from the quiet moon, and, in hours when these failed, from the far-off incomprehensible stars!

The moral is a very plain one, and a very austere one also; for it is this. The beauty and calm which, we trust, shall dwell within our souls towards the evening and close of *our* day are not to be won in the evening itself, but are to be gathered in through all the hours and days of our life. We must not look for peace, for order and beauty in our life towards the end, if to-day and now and always we are not setting ourselves against the riotous elements of our nature.

It is this that makes the passing of time a serious thing. It is not merely that time is passing. It is rather that from the point of view of the culture of our souls time is opportunity. In other words, there is a season for everything, and once the season is past for doing a particular thing, or acquiring a particular grace, we are almost helpless. There is, for example, the

season of youth, in which for the most part we are called upon to be severe with ourselves, in short, to resist. In the later seasons of our life we are called upon, for the most part, to endure rather than to resist. Or we might say that in youth we are asked to practise virtue; later on to yield to grace. Of course, it is never quite sound to divide the seasons of our life in that way or in any way. But it is admitted by all who are in earnest that there are certain temptations and weaknesses which threaten us peculiarly at certain times, and that it is then and not afterwards that these must be dealt with and transformed. Youth has its own dangers and excesses; so has middle life; and so doubtless has old age—and it is in the actual besetting hour that the good fight has to be waged. There is a time for doing things, and though in God's mercy any one of us may have such grace given to him that he may recover ground, still, if we have been unfaithful in some true matter of life, we have no right to escape a certain sense of loss, a certain sorrow of regret at the end.

¶ 'Time is short' with reference to its opportunities. For this is the emphatic meaning of the original—literally, 'the opportunity is compressed, or shut in.' Time may be long, and yet the opportunity may be very short. The sun in autumn may be bright and clear, but the seed which has not been sown until then will not vegetate. A man may have vigour and energy in manhood and maturity, but the work which ought to have been done in childhood and youth cannot be done in old age. A chance once gone in this world can never be recovered. Have you learned the meaning of yesterday? Do you rightly estimate the importance of to-day? That there are duties to be done to-day which cannot be done to-morrow? The time for working is short, therefore begin to-day; 'for the night is coming when no man can work.' . . . Wake to the opportunities that yet remain.¹

Whoever would be a good man one day must be a good man now. To faithful souls there will surely come in the evening a time of true peace, with the light coming in from the west. As, at the touch of death, the autumn leaf yields up its secret, hiding no longer the golden glory which was always there, surely we may believe that it will not be otherwise in the world of human souls. Even here and already

¹ F. W. Robertson.

we may have seen the holy thing take place, a wonderful light beginning to come into the face of one who has fought the good fight in some last trench of faith. And, without drawing upon the firm promise of our Lord that so indeed it will be, surely it is what we should look for from the Eternal Justice, that here in part, but in the other world in all perfection, the fruits of all holy living, the reward of every faithful deed, the beauty that came from every personal sacrifice, shall survive and shall clothe in glory those whose due it is.

¶ 'Are you eighty, after all,' writes Phillips Brooks, of Boston, to his friend Dr Clark: 'Are you eighty? Is it not a mistake and a fraud? Are you quite sure? As to your legs, you must not worry yourself about them. . . . We shall carry you in our arms so that your feet shall not touch the rough, coarse earth, if you will only stay with us, and brighten, and enlighten, and console, and strengthen, and amuse.'

But let us make it plain to ourselves that it is in these present days and in our own circumstances that we must win any beauty, any peace of mind, any happy outlook—such as we surely would desire to have in the evening of our life and at its close. Let us make it plain that at the end we shall appear simply as we are; that what we are in secret will be made manifest, as though it were proclaimed from the house-tops. Let us see to it that we are seeking *now* those things of the spirit which we would not be without at the end. If, for example, there is any habit in our life which we feel one day must cease; if there is anything in our behaviour, in our temper of mind which we ourselves mean shall be changed; if there is anything which we are keeping back from God, which nevertheless we know will one day trouble us; well, now is the time; now is all we have.

The Importunity of God

Is. lxv. 1, 2.—'I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name. I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people.'

THAT is very great; but it does not quite give us what the prophet meant to say. Dr Moffatt has put it in this way:

Ready was I to answer men who never asked me,
 ready to be found by men who never sought me.
 I cried out, 'Here am I,'
 to folk who never called to me.
 I have stretched my hands, all day, to unruly
 rebels.

There, in four successive clauses, the prophet beats out his amazement in the presence of two companion facts. They are the merciful importunity of a God who wishes to be known, and the settled indifference of men.

1. Throughout the history of his nation the prophet saw these two continually exemplified. God had beset them behind and before, He had laid His hand upon them, but even so they did not look up to recognize the Father. They sorely needed Him. Trouble pressed them hard. In many ways they betrayed their hunger and desire for help, and yet, when He was at their door, they had no welcome for Him. 'He came unto his own,' says St John, 'and his own received him not.' In the bare recording of the fact, a quite bewildering situation is exposed, and it belongs not to any single age or race or class. It is world-wide.

The fact of this indifference is too plain to call for many words. In our own country we find a people reared in Christian homes who now betray what often seems to us like the absence of a sense. Just as for many music or art or humour has no meaning, so to these religion is without interest. They have always known about the truth; they have heard it worthily and movingly presented. What is of more account, they have seen it embodied in noble and beneficent lives. They have seen how instinctive and how natural prayer may be, and what great things may be looked for through it. But for them all this now is as if it had not happened, and religion is something for which they have no taste.

If this is true under the influence of Christian training, it is not surprising that hearts outside should be found callous and unresponsive. A life of low standard inevitably gives the spirit a bent. As Jeremiah says, 'They followed vanity, and they became vain.' In the Ephesian letters St Paul speaks of the Gentiles as having ceased to feel, that is to say they were no longer shocked at things which ought to shock and repel. They have come to acquiesce in

what is base, because custom has given it sanction. Thus, says the Apostle, they are alienated from the life of God.

¶ In a romantic and popular history of the second century, it is recorded that at the moment of the birth of Jesus the whole of Creation in every part was thrilled, all movement was suspended, the sun stood still, and every human action throughout the world, the mother feeding her child, the woodman swinging his axe, the cut tree in the act of falling, all came under the same arrest. In his hymn on the Nativity, Milton catches at the idea and presents it in stately verse. Anyone who believes may recognize a certain grand congruity in what Ignatius calls 'a mystery of shouting,' a miracle of the heart of God so amazing and so transforming as to deserve universal recognition. The story is poetry, it is not history. There was no such universal response in Nature, there was no halting of the sun or stars, there was no arrest of human passion, the world travelled on its noisy way with graver matters to concern it, as men reckoned, than any obscure event in Bethlehem. 'Into this mystery,' says Peter, 'the angels desired to look,' but on man's part it was received with stolid indifference.

2. Let us turn now to the prophet's other amazement. It is an extraordinary conception of the Most High as a suppliant, making suit to His creatures and being denied His requests. Yet St Paul found substance in it. He said, 'we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were beseeching you through us.' There is a rather needless concern for God's dignity which makes God's creatures shy at such expressions. It is easier, of course, to conceive of an Infinite Power sitting aloof, and watching the world spin, but Scripture has no such morbid jealousy for the dignity of God; it everywhere speaks of a God who is achieving great things for His creatures, a God whose heart is like our own, only it is Divinely deep. In his description of the magnificent man, Aristotle notes concerning him that the magnificent man does not run. His movements are dignified, and unhurried; emotion is never allowed to carry him away. But, in the guise of a story, Jesus tells of His Father, and ours, and describes Him as running to welcome a son come home in disgrace. There is more, it seems, than stateliness and magnificence here.

To the deepest souls in Israel it was always clear that any active movement towards deliverance must be on God's side before it can be on our side. When Jehovah brought back the captives to Zion, 'we were like men that dreamed,' says the poet. Hope at its wildest dreams had never risen so high. No wisdom so daring of ours could have contrived such a plan. Through all their changing chronicles, that same note recurs. From first to last the design is His, the activity and the wisdom and the patience and the overflowing kindness.

Sometimes the minds of those who sing of the deliverance of God have been captured by the sense of the irresistible energy of His will. One poet described how, when Israel came out of Egypt, 'the mountains leaped like rams, the little hills like lambs.' Men and women in dejection are continually disposed to pay more honour than is due to material things, to the obstructions set in the way of their redemption. To the poet it was certain that the most solid-seeming things have no solidity when they stand in the way of the saving will of God. No barriers, however high, can block His way when He comes for the deliverance of His own.

But the aspect of His coming which, for the moment, most engaged the mind of this writer, was the persistence of it. In one of His parables Jesus calls us to be importunate in our petition, not to be discouraged by any look of delay or disregard. Why, He says, the peasant at midnight battering at the door of his sleeping and sulky neighbour, a friendless widow pleading before a single judge—even these can carry their point if their will is settled. Our importunity at its highest has little in comparison with His, who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Francis Thompson speaks of Him as 'The Tremendous Lover.' Men may seek to hide from Him in trivial pastimes; in the chatter of society, amid the roar of business they escape from the weariness and the dread of being alone, but he waits and pursues. Jonah pushed out upon the wide sea, thinking that thus he could pass clear from the importunate urgencies of God. When he thought himself safe, he found that he had run right into the will of God. The Shepherd, says Jesus, after his lost sheep, seeks diligently until he finds. That is what is declared in the Incarnation and the Cross. That amazing coming down from heaven to earth means

nothing else than this: 'He came to seek and to save that which was lost.'

¶ Meister Eckhart has well said, 'He who will escape Him, only runs to His bosom; for all corners are open to Him.'

¶ In an English Law Court we heard a wife, who bore on her scarred face the marks of her husband's cruelty, plead for his acquittal as if he had brought only happiness into her life. Some one asked as we stood there, 'What can she see in the man to love?' and none could answer for no other saw what she had seen in him. But who can explain the yearning of God for sinful man, or give any account of the mystery of the Cross? ¹

3. These, then, were the prophet's two amazements—this bewildering indifference of men, and over against it this loving importunity of God. It is in a world where both of these are plainly seen that we have been called to labour. The first of these is obtrusively thrust upon our sense. 'The natural man understands not the things of the spirit of God,' says Paul. To him they are sheer folly and thus with ill-concealed contempt or derision he passes the message by. When that goes on year after year it is apt to have its effect on the temper even of good and devout men and women. It dulls the spirit, it depresses hope, it brings in the spirit of drudgery. In a letter to a girl wishing to be a missionary, Robert Louis Stevenson tells the story of a tramp who protested that he wished for any work, and a kindly cynic offered him pay if for one hour he would strike at a log with the blunt end of the axe. By and by the tramp flung down the tool declaring that no one could work if he did not ever see the chips fly. Well, says Stevenson, 'in the calling that you have chosen, you will never see the chips fly.' Happily that is far from being true. Yet there is a sufficient element of truth in it to account for a multitude of disheartened and jaded workmen. When no heart opens, when no face brightens, when no life seems transformed, it is hard to keep hope alive.

¶ I had now been preaching for many months, and had met with no response whatever. Occasionally a stranger or two visited the chapel, and with what eager eyes did I not watch for them on the next Sunday, but none

1 T. H. Davies.

of them came twice. It was amazing to me that I could pour out myself as I did, poor although I knew that self to be, and yet make so little impression. Not one man or woman seemed any different because of anything I had said or done, and not a soul kindled at any word of mine, no matter with what earnestness it might be charged.¹

This oppression of dullness is a real fact in presence of the persistent perverseness of men, and so for the prosperity of our life we look more persistently at the prophet's other amazement. 'If God be for us,' said Calvin constantly in the very evil early days of the Reformation when they were in hiding in Paris, 'who can be against us?' If God be for us, if our poor efforts find a place within the scope of His persistent, Divine efforts, if our soon-flagging patience is sustained and reinforced by His unwearied urgency, if behind our slackening love and failing hope, there is that love which has no measure, if God be with us, who can be against us? Paul in one place says, 'Inasmuch as I have received mercy, I do not lose heart.' God's patient mercy found out me, His love declared in Jesus Christ has set my cold heart on fire. What need is there to despair? Paul says, it is a duty we owe to our great Lord that at all times we should show ourselves hopeful and of good courage. A wise sanguineness is often half the battle.

¶ An officer of Napoleon's who was with him in Russia describes that tragic nightmare of the retreat across the snow—how order and discipline collapsed, how weapons and equipment were flung away, and how at last a little straggle of famished and despairing men staggered on until they fell. Then, like a point of light in that murky sea, he depicts the rear-guard where Marshal Ney was in command. 'He had only,' says Seguiet, 'a handful of serviceable rifles and a resolute countenance, but he drove the Cossacks back again and again.'

The Changing Label

Is. lxv. 15, 16.—'He shall call his servants by another name: so that he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth' (R.V.).

1. AMONG the combatants in the War it was necessary to keep changing the ciphers and the code names from time to time, because there was always the risk that the enemy might have got hold of them and would use them to mislead and to destroy; that what had been at first designed as a safeguard and a guide for brave fighters should prove their snare and their destruction. The great Commander, says the prophet, knows the importance of perpetually changing the passwords into His presence, of reminting the coinage of spiritual commerce, of reorganizing and remanning the battalions of righteousness. If communication between the fighters in the front line and Headquarters is to be kept up untapped and untampered with by a ceaselessly vigilant foe, there is need that we should ever be examining ourselves to see whether we be in the faith.

This is what the prophet means by saying that God 'shall call his servants by another name: so that he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth.' If contact with God is to be a real and vital and ever-fresh experience, each generation, and often each individual in his generation, may have to keep changing the form or the manner of his approach. It is vital for true religion, the prophet says, that those who pray here upon earth should pray to a God of truth, that is to say, a God who is true for them—intellectually true, morally true, spiritually true. And that may mean that we shall have to change some of our ways of speaking about God and about sacred things. There are, in Christian churches, multitudes of idolaters—people, that is to say, who insist on bowing down to things which may once have represented God, but are to-day taking the place of God. Idolatry consists in bowing down to unrealities of any kind, whether they be creations of the hands or figments of the intellect. Kipling has said that it will be one of the rewards of eternity for faithful workers, that each shall then 'draw the thing as he sees it, for the God of things as they are.' That is not the reward of eternity; it is the requisite for time.

¹ *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, 46.

¶ In the Preface to their translation of the *Odyssey* Butcher and Lang tell us that 'of Homer there can be no final translation. The taste and literary habits of each age demand different qualities in poetry, and therefore a different sort of rendering of Homer. . . . In each there must be, in addition to what is Greek and eternal, the element of what is modern, personal, and fleeting.'¹

The God who desires truth in the inward parts from those who would approach His presence surely desires it most of all in our thought and in our language about Him and His ways. 'He shall call his servants by another name.' They are still His servants although their old familiar name has been changed. The only thing that matters is 'that he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth.' 'Truth in the inward parts' is the first gift of Almighty God to the soul turning again to seek His face. Later on He will enable such an one in the hidden part to know that wisdom which girds truth with tenderness and beauty.

It is very hard to be a good Christian. It is so much easier to be merely an orthodox one. It is easy enough to appear reverent in outward form: it is hard to be reverent in deed and in truth. They seemed a highly reverent, respectable majority who appeared to be so terribly shocked at the bare idea of destroying the Temple. 'This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.' It was really shocking; the thing was intolerable! It is always confusing and perturbing to lazy natures to have names perpetually changing. It was never easy to bless oneself in the God of truth. It was always so much more convenient to deal with the God of convention.

2. 'He shall call his servants by another name.' Daniel and his companions must have disliked having their names changed in Babylon. They were the names they had received from their fathers, the names by which they had been called from childhood by their mothers, names that breathed religious conviction and whose very sound was holy. But they were still God's

¹ H. L. Simpson, *Altars of Earth*, 27.

servants when people of a strange speech were calling them Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. The one thing that mattered was that they were keeping up a vital contact with the God of heaven, to whom they prayed three times a day, and so were made strong to walk in the midst of the fiery furnace and to endure in the den of lions.

These are not easy times in which we are living for those who are joined to the past by tender and holy ties and many gracious memories. No doubt there are many who thought at one time that their whole philosophy of life would go if a day should ever come when the theology of the *Shorter Catechism* or Prayer Book and any syllable of Holy Writ ceased in the smallest detail of expression to represent for them essential and unalterable truth. But for their peace of mind they have long since been glad to recognize that their eternal salvation depends neither upon the 'credibility of Judges nor the edibility of Jonah.' Names and forms and customs may and must change, but the God of truth—the Amen God, as the Hebrew has it—remains unchanged. We can recognize His servants when they appear, even though some of them wear unfamiliar garments and bear new names. Whatsoever is of the truth is the servant of God.

¶ Dr W. P. Merrill, minister of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York and one of the authentic spiritual interpreters of our generation, said at the time of the fortieth anniversary of his ordination: 'One primary conviction has gained in power and assurance every year—that there is no substitute for intellectual honesty; that the first and most fundamental duty, the prime condition of all real religion, is to *play fair with truth*. I saw it dimly at the beginning. I see it far more clearly now. A closed mind, a soul that deliberately declines to look squarely at any and all facts, is not only in danger; it is in sin. To evade truth, to dodge facts, to twist plain realities, is mental and spiritual suicide.'¹

3. In that day when His disciples should see ruin and destruction coming upon much which they had loved, when her enemies should cast a mound against Jerusalem, and, dismayed, her sons and daughters should behold their spiritual mother compassed with armies; 'when these

¹ W. R. Bowie, *On Being Alive*, 234.

things begin to come to pass,' said Jesus, 'then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.' It must have been hard for His disciples to see how redemption could come through the utter destruction of so much of what they had from childhood been taught to revere. It must have been difficult to understand how a time of universal confusion should be the occasion for the lifting up of their heads in expectation and triumph. But through the destruction of Jerusalem the message of the gospel was spread throughout the world. Through the overthrow of one form of religious organization there came the revelation and the propagation of a better.

In the midst of the confusion and overthrow of which we all are conscious to-day, for those who have a living faith in the unchanging Christ, there should be nothing but exultation and a lifting up of the head to behold the coming of better and greater things. Nothing can suffer destruction save that which is done and ready to pass away. It will all be gain if faith pass from a matter of empty forms and half-believed dogmas to a living and energizing knowledge of, and life in, the eternal Son of God. The future belongs to clear thinking and scrupulous honesty of the intellect. As Dean Inge has put it, 'A number of unworthy beliefs about God are being tacitly dropped, and they are so treated because they are unworthy of Him.' An old Quaker used to repeat over and over again, 'Get an experience. Get an experience.' It was his way of emphasizing the 'importance of individual gleanings from life.' One experimentally proved belief is of more value to the individual soul, and through him to the Church, than a book of professed creed. Most of us probably believe rather less than we did when we set out upon the life of faith. Gradually, slowly, even sorrowfully perhaps, we find our beliefs getting fewer, but the faith that remains grows deeper, and means more, as the years go on.

¶ 'The first thing that strikes me about my own creed to-day,' writes Dr George Jackson, 'is how much shorter it is than that with which my Christian life began. Every man's creed, however many may be the clauses in it, is, after all, but as a tiny circle of light in the vast, encompassing darkness. In my own case the darkness has encroached still further on what I once thought was light: I am not so sure now of some things as I was forty years ago.

Somebody once remarked, rather acidly, of a group of Christians whom I will not name, that they lengthened the Creed but shortened the Commandments. I have no wish to shorten the Commandments; I have just as little to lengthen the Creed. Even the Apostles' Creed and, still more, the Nicene, are too long for me; there is more in both than I can fight for, more than I need to live by.'¹

The future of religion will depend upon a deep moral and spiritual power in the hearts and minds of men who have at length learned the value of the new currency, and have exchanged profession for experience. There will be general recognition of the fact that there can be no orthodoxy but truth; that it is infinitely more important that an expression of faith should be intensive than that it should be extensive; that the paramount question is not, What creed do you hold? but only, What creed holds you? By many another name may God's servants be called ere the Kingdom comes. But come it will when he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who dedicates himself to the service of God and man in the earth shall swear his high vow by the God of truth.

God's New World

Is. lxv. 17.—'For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.'

THIS has been called the Magna Carta of humanity. It is a picture of the new Divine order. A Utopian picture, it may be thought; but in no easy Utopian way will it come to pass. The evil must be cast out; and the Bible way of doing this is drastic, but never easy. It is never a matter of readjustment; for evil destroys that which it invades. There is nothing for it but re-creation.

1. 'For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth'; so entirely new and different from the old that 'the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind.' So great will be the joy of the new order of things that the memory of the unhappy past will be blotted out. 'But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I

¹ *What I Believe.*

create ; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy.' Some of the causes for joy are here mentioned. 'There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days.' There shall be an end not only to infant mortality but also to premature death. Longevity was an early Hebrew substitute for immortality. One of the Mosaic promises was 'that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' Here old age is to be a blessing, not 'that unhoped serene which men call age.' 'The child shall die an hundred years old'; that is, the centenarian shall have the heart of a child. Age will not count, age does not count, when a man has been released from all internal struggle with himself. 'But the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.' Age counts there all right. Sin makes people old.

Then there follows a picture of life in a time of peace ; there will be stable industrial conditions and security of tenure ; 'They shall build houses, and inhabit them ; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.' They shall enjoy the fruit of their labours. They shall not be dispossessed by eviction or impoverished by depression. 'They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble.' Toil shall no longer end in the ruin of their hopes, nor shall children be born into the world to meet some terrible catastrophe.

2. There are those who will say that such a time of settled security would not be good for the race ; that the greatest gains have come through the discipline of unsettlement, war, struggle and depression. It is not assumed that the discipline of struggle will come to an end. In a sense it will only be begun. The constructive work of peace demands all the resources of the human spirit, all the honour, chivalry, and courage that any war has ever called forth. For peace is not the mere absence of war. Think what a terrible thing the task of peace must necessarily be ! Do we realize how strongly evil is entrenched in every nation in Christendom, the legalized iniquities there are, the vested interests which tie the hands of Governments ? All these will have to be broken. It will mean a loss in revenue to every State. It will mean a cutting of their gains to many who, under present conditions, cannot see the evil for the revenue.

¶ Says a young man in a novel of H. G. Wells,¹ 'War is an activity—Peace is not. If you take war out of the world, you must have some other activity. . . . We don't want a preventative League of Nations ; it's got to be creative or nothing. . . . People with intelligence and imagination won't stand a passive peace. Under no circumstances can you hope to induce the chap who contrived the clock fuse, and the chap who worked out my gas-bag or the chap with a new aeroplane gadget, and me—me too—to stop celebrating and making our damndest just in order to sit about safely in meadows joining up daisy chains.'

Surely this is the time for looking into the fallacies that have made possible all the wars in history. We must look into our own hearts too. Deep down we shall find all sorts of national reserves and prejudices, so disguised and rationalized that many would call them their convictions. The only convictions some people have are just bundles of their own select prejudices. We must get down to these. It is not enough that the glorified ideas of war have been generally exploded. The explosion must happen in our own hearts. To allow another disaster to come upon the human race is 'to sell the pass,' and to betray the trust of those who believed that in fighting in a war to end war they were in the highest way of duty. Both they and we believed it ; and we must now give proof of our belief that they did not die in vain. No war can ever end war, unless there be born in men's hearts the will to peace. It took all those precious lives to teach us the lesson that war settles nothing, not even a boundary line. And for us it is no longer a question whether war is justifiable but a question whether it is Christian. 'The debate about war is really closed.' It cannot be God's way of settling disputes : and, if we are His children, it cannot be ours.

¶ 'We shall never get a warless world,' says Miss Fry, 'through the propaganda of peace in the abstract. Nothing will hold us when a cyclone of war feeling sweeps over a country but a deep-seated habit of goodwill cultivated and formed in the hearts and lives of men.'

¶ 'The other day,' writes Dr James Reid, 'a trawler fished up from the sea some bits of a substance that looked innocent and interesting. Some of it was sent to a museum, and was there

¹ Joan and Peter.

found to be a deadly explosive used during the war. A message was sent out to any who might have kept some pieces in their cabins to fling them overboard at once. One can imagine the new eyes with which these objects would be looked at, and the haste to be rid of them. The world needs moral disarmament. It needs to get rid of the deadly explosive from the heart—the hate, and pride, and prejudice that break out in war.’

Peace is not passivism: it is a time of the most urgent, positive, creative activity. Hitherto, peace has been regarded more or less as the dull waiting, marking-time period that lies between one war and the next. Have we ever thought what a creative time of peace would be like? We cannot have it unless nations, like men, are engaged in real team work of creative living and creative action. It is the most positive and constructive form of activity, as is borne out by the prophet’s words: ‘they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks’; not into useless rubbish, but into instruments to serve a useful purpose in the help of man and in the service of the Prince of Peace.

3. But we must come back to the prophet’s picture of the new world. ‘They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble.’ Think of the uselessness of all labour, with the shadow of impending war over everything, not only the work of man’s hands, but over human love and joy. War cuts at the root of everything undertaken in faith, hope, and love. ‘We shall rebuild,’ cried brave old Cardinal Mercier, when he heard of the destruction of the precious University of Louvain. Yes, but there are more urgent things to do for the race than to rebuild what ought never to have been broken down. And there are treasures destroyed beyond recovery.

‘They shall not labour in vain.’ This is the true Labour Charter. Think of the multitudes who are to-day labouring in vain, whose work brings them little profit and less joy: or think of the millions of workless tramping the streets, part of the heritage of war. ‘Labouring in vain.’ But in the new world, the demand for labour will not only be equal to the supply, but there will be such a spirit among the workers that every man will be equal to his job.

‘They shall not labour in vain, nor bring

forth for trouble.’ Think of the children who are being brought forth for trouble, to give trouble. Think of the factors that are at work in the breaking up of the home, marriage sanctions, the life of the family. And then, think of the picture we have here, even in so early a stage of the world’s history, a picture we have not yet come within sight of—domestic, social, and industrial life reconstructed on a basis of joy; family and social well-being, economic prosperity and peace.

It may seem a dream, but it is a dream that persists. It is the dream that Jesus came to give; and He so believed in its coming to pass that He sealed it with His blood. It is by such dreams that the heart of man is sustained and kept alive. It will mean a new world when the old spirit of ruthless competition goes, when ‘they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord’; when Nature herself will participate and rejoice in the general reconstruction, even as St Paul believed she would. This must have been Dr Alexander Whyte’s meaning when he once said: ‘All Nature has an evangelical future.’ The whole creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God, for the God-anointed men and women who will bring about the new social order.

He whom a dream hath possessed knoweth no more of doubting,

For mist and the blowing of winds and the mouthing of words he scorns;

Not the sinuous speech of schools he hears, but a knightly shouting,

And never comes darkness down, yet he greeteth a million morns.

Enjoying Our Work

Is. LXV. 22, 23.—‘My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for calamity’ (R.V.).

WHAT the prophet is here promising his countrymen is that the hard days through which they are passing are leading on to a finer time, to a time above everything else of solid social security. A day is coming, he declares, if they will only brace themselves to endure with dignity and self-possession a few more dragging hours of night, when they will be no more

subject to alarms, when things will be settled on a sound basis, when a man will be able to make plans in confidence that they will not be over-turned by the invasion of the enemy and by panic at home. It is as he elaborates such a prospect that he uses this phrase about 'enjoying the work of their hands,' meaning, of course, that in that steady order of things which is coming a man will reap the harvest of his labours, that life will be continuous and orderly—effects following upon causes, consequences following upon plans, so that one may cheer himself as he ploughs up some heavy soil by reflecting that one day he will gather a harvest from that very field.

This is the irreducible minimum which human beings will always demand: and if it is denied them there will be restlessness and trouble. We must have, as far as possible, a predictable and calculable future. We want to know where we are; to know also, so far as it is possible to know, what kind of place this world is going to try to be during the next thirty years. We want to know whether human beings are to continue to equip and train themselves only for war and for those various subtleties and disgraceful ingenuities without which it would appear mere courage and honour are still at a disadvantage in this world. We want to have a reasonable assurance that if we train our children in the Christian tradition, they will live their life in a world which has still some use for decent men.

And this is what Isaiah promised to the men of his day—that they should 'enjoy the work of their hands'; that, if they build a house they may look forward to having it as their home; that, if they tend their garden, they may comfort themselves in advance with the anticipation of the fruits and the flowers which that garden shall produce.

1. As the prophet uses the words, to 'enjoy the work of their hands' means to enjoy the fruit, or the outcome of their labours. But our subject is rather the art, for it is largely an art, of enjoying the actual doing of one's work. And really there is not much difference in the two interpretations; for what constitutes the element of joy or happiness in work is, when all is said, the sense of the future, the prospect of the approaching completeness and success of the work in which we are engaged. 'To enjoy one's

work'—that certainly ought to be the average and normal human experience. To be harnessed to work which is wholly distasteful, or to work which cannot be shown to have any value, must demoralize and dishearten any thinking man or woman. We can see what a happy community that would be, in which people for the most part were engaged in tasks which added to their own sense of dignity and human value. We can see also what a prosperous community it would be, for when our heart is in our work we do more and do it better, whereas when we work grudgingly we do less than we might, and what we do is apt to want a certain finish and thoroughness.

¶ We may recall how, in the depths of the War, our shipbuilders and naval engineers had, week by week, and almost day by day to address themselves to a new problem in order to safeguard us from the menace of some new contrivance on the part of the enemy. Ships, which one week seemed to embody the last word on offence or defence, had to be set aside, broken up, radically amended, in order to meet the attack of some new weapon. And we may remember hearing how the workmen got tired, called upon as they were to labour with all their might, putting together some fabric, which next day they might be ordered to break up. They quite naturally became tired and reluctant at a task which at any moment might be pronounced futile.

¶ When the Panama Canal was being made, the men, working for months in wet sunken trenches, were often listless and depressed. Then someone suggested that a plan of the whole completed canal should be placed in each worker's hut, so that he might see at a glance the progress of the work and the contribution which his own painful efforts were making towards its completion. The result of this device was to give the men a sense of the purpose of their labours, and to deliver them from the feeling of futility.

Now, however hard it may be for us to bring about conditions in which every one shall do his work, or hers, with joy at least predominating, we must never abandon the hope of such a state of affairs. To say of a fine prospect that it is impossible often means that we ourselves are so satisfied with our own place in the general system of things that we are not prepared to risk any change, though it be to compass some

more general good. 'Impossible' is no word to be applied to any such outlook, by a man who believes in God. What, indeed, is belief in God—from this point of view—but the affirmation by the human soul that the best is the only thing which is to be accounted real.

2. When one speaks of happiness and enjoyment one has in mind something more serious and deeper than mere gaiety, or animal spirits. No one expects that life will provide him with uninterrupted pleasure. That would soon prove intolerable to such beings as we are. What we mean is that every man or woman shall be able to feel that the work in which he or she is engaged, is right and necessary and honourable, demanding from himself or herself qualities of mind or character.

Every healthy and sensible person is prepared to find that life, to use the phrase of the street, is not a picnic. To say no more, we should be ashamed to make a picnic of a life which so many find an agony or a curse. And if the real meaning of life is to make of us something in the way of character, why then it may be that life is never such a good thing, in the sense that it is never such a testing thing, as in the days or hours when the aspect of it is dark. For then it is that one may learn whether in the great game which our life is one is a good loser. And to be a good loser in life, what is that but to be a great believer!

And so one of the conditions for finding joy in our work, and happiness in life, is that we should see our work in the light of its own completion; or in the light of the service it is likely to render; or in the approval of another, or of our own conscience. For apart from the happiness which comes to every unspoiled human being from the very use of his mind and muscles, we men and women were never intended to live with our minds riveted to the immediate thing. To see our work with nothing within or beyond is to be no longer a worker, but a drudge.

It is the sense of the future which lights up the dark places of any task. That future may be something in itself very humble and very human. It may be the prospect of an hour in the evening with a friend, or a day with a fishing-rod, or a few days' leisure. It may be the hope of ridding ourselves finally of some financial burdens, of qualifying ourselves in

certain matters to look the whole world in the face—which Longfellow tells us was what made the nightingale sing in the heart of the Village Blacksmith. But whatever it is, it serves its blessed purpose if it sets our spirit free; if it delivers us from dullness, making us keen and uncomplaining. And if pedants tell us that to find the true inspiration for our work in things beyond the work itself is not good morals, we must reply that just so God made us.

For surely man has done all his hard and great things for the sake of something beyond the immediate hour. He has done them to a certain stir of desire and hope and dream, to the call of some loyalty which kept him unfaltering and true. God does not mean man to trudge along the way, but to march along the way; and we cannot march except to music. The music by which man marches may not be heard with the hearing of the ear, but music it is, the breath of the remote, the unworldly, the altogether different, which does not make man futile and rebellious towards his actual tasks, but bathes those tasks in such light, that the trials by the way seem not worthy to be compared with his own free soul as he feels his joy and strength.

3. In the complicated life of the modern world, it requires more imagination, more thoughtfulness, to see in the small field of our own daily work and business, that importance which in simpler times made work more obviously worth while. Few of us see things out, having presided over every process from beginning to end. At best we do our part, whereupon the thing passes out of our control. Or if our work is in the region of ideas we speak or write, and the word dies away on our lips, or passes from the notice of our fellows. It takes thought and faith to perceive how a word faithfully spoken may have fitted into some one's need whose name we shall never know, and so may have fortified the whole cause of the spirit in this world.

It would, we feel sure, bring instant happiness to every worker if he could see in all its completeness the work towards which by his fidelity he contributed even some small share. What healthy and normal workman can look upon some fine machine without envying in secret those whose hands achieved it.

¶ It is not for nothing, and it is not an idle

motion of the hands that prompts me when time and again a great ship has borne me safely across the Atlantic, not only to shake hands with the Captain as I leave, but as I descend the gangway and touch land, to take off my hat to the ship itself! In that gesture I am doing honour to every man who drove home a rivet truly.¹

Even if in this world we seldom see evidence of the worth of our work, and might be disposed to think we had lived in vain, it is not so if our work was discharged with exactness and care. It is true that in order to overcome such feelings we may, at times, have to be content with a severe and remote compensation. But if we have learnt so to be content, to accept it as true for ourselves that God would not have us grow up like spoiled children loaded with presents, but like strong men who are ready to do without, and to seem to lose, that of itself will have been a great victory of the spirit. And later on we shall begin to associate ourselves with those who perceived that this dying-to-live, this living-to-serve, is the true law and glory of our being; and turning then to Jesus Christ we shall hail Him with a new understanding. We shall see Him as God's typical and characteristic Son who lived and bore and died in sheer fidelity to life's most beautiful interpretation, not asking rewards or recognitions, rejoicing in the work of His hands, not asking to be ministered unto, but to minister, not complaining of the dullness of His surroundings. On a poor and contracted stage He poured out His soul for those who looked on and did not understand. And, seeing that it is to Him who was content to work it out on the loom of common and obscure days, that man now looks with adoration and entreaty, we take heart again because the same God who gave Christ His life-task may have appointed to ourselves a humble stage.

Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold
Is broken away, and the long-pent fire
Like the golden hope of the world un baffled,
Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire!

¹ John A. Hutton.

The Three Voices

Is. lxvi. 6.—'A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies.'

WE may, without forcing their sense, apply these words to the Ascension of our Lord. The three elements in the text—a voice from the city, a voice from the Temple, and a voice of the Lord—appear in the story of the Ascension. The Third Isaiah in uttering the words of the text was describing the impending judgment on the enemies of the Lord. Idolatrous Jews and heathen nations alike would share in the retribution which will fall ere long. We pass in thought to the scene of the Ascension. On the Mount of Olives stands the little band of faithful disciples in converse with their Master. The hour of His departure has arrived. He must withdraw from the sight of bodily eyes. Ere He leaves His friends our Lord's voice is heard giving the Divine Commission to His Church: 'Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.' With it came the promise of His perpetual presence with them: 'Lo! I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age.' With it came also the promise of power: 'Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be my witnesses.'

1. *The Voice of the Lord.*—When the prophet spoke of 'a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies' he had vengeance in his mind. The victory of Christ was different. The Old Testament cry of vengeance had given place to the New Testament message of mercy. The victory of Christ dealt a crushing blow to the forces of darkness, but to other enemies it brought reconciliation, actual gifts of grace and glory, the promise of the perpetual presence of the Ascended Lord. There followed the heavenly approval of all that the Lord had done, corresponding in act with the voice which had sounded from heaven at His baptism and at His Transfiguration: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' The crowning episode of the Ascension took place, and the Father exalted His only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph into His Kingdom in heaven. The words of the Psalmist may well be applied to the Ascension: 'Thou

hast led captivity captive : thou hast received gifts for men ; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.'

The voice is the same to-day as it was on the Mount of Olives. The progressive revelation of God culminated in the Ascension. 'God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.' Step by step the Son revealed Himself and the disciples were led on. The Cross was a mystery and sorrow to them. The Resurrection was almost beyond belief. The Ascension, however, evoked worship and joy. It proffered the crowning revelation, the continuous presence of Jesus Christ. This is the voice which the world needs to hear to-day—the voice of victory, of blessing, of gifts for men.

2. *The Voice of the City.*—The voice of the city was not in harmony with the voice of the Lord at the Ascension. The city lay not far distant, quite unconscious of what was passing on the Mount of Olives. The Holy City, of all cities, ought to have been in touch with God. Its voice should have harmonized with the voice of the Lord, but from it there was no clear note—nothing but a confused noise. There were discordant and divergent sounds from it, but they agreed in one thing—the rejection of Christ. On that point the Pilates and the Herods of the city were at one.

'A voice of noise from the city.' Can we detect what the voice of the city is saying? Is it that amid the din the voice of those who shout the loudest is the one which is heard? Noise there is enough, and is it not a confused noise—a sound of sorrow and sacrifice, and with it one of shouting and selfishness? As Job put it in words which sound strangely modern, 'Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out.' We may not be able to detect it, but there must be some resultant voice, which expresses the sentiment of the whole, which decides its policy, which moulds its destiny. Can we pretend that the voice of the city is akin to the voice of God? There are thousands who care little for His voice. What message does God catch as He listens to the voice of the city? He receives some message; we may be sure of that. Does He catch here and there some

S.O.S. signal? Perhaps so, and such sound causes joy among the angels in heaven, but how faint is the longing for His salvation. The voice of the city has its good features, but how largely it is one of Godlessness.

¶ Shelley's lines are very apt. He speaks of London as

that great sea, whose ebb and flow
At once is deaf and loud, and on the shore
Vomits its wrecks, and still howls on for more.
Yet in its depth what treasures !¹

3. *The Voice of the Church.*—If anything, the voice of the Temple was less in harmony with the voice of the Lord than that of the city, for there were some in the city who were in sympathy with Christ. There were the faithful women; the publicans and harlots; one or two of the members of the Sanhedrin; perhaps, also, the common people, who heard Him gladly; but none of the leaders of the Church came Christ's way as yet. It could not be said so far that a great company of the priests was obedient to the faith. Unfortunately, too, there was little likelihood of change. The Temple thought itself right. It suffered from a closed mind—the bane of Caiaphas. But now a new strain was to be brought into its life. There entered into its midst a little band of enthusiasts. How happy they seemed! It was strange that this should be the case. Parting from a dearly loved friend is generally an occasion for sorrow.

¶ Some of us have stood on a railway platform waving our hand as the train carried away, perhaps for many grey days, one whom we dearly loved. Or we have stood on a dock side until a steamer got so far away that it was futile to stand waving any more, when one who had filled all our life with sunshine and joy and fellowship, passed out of sight to accomplish some new task. We have felt at such times the unutterable sadness of farewell, and we feel we know the anguish in those lines of Tennyson :

the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted
swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere

¹ Letter to Maria Gisborne.

Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.¹

On the eve of the Cross the Master had said to His disciples: 'Because I have said these things, sorrow hath filled your heart.' After the Cross it was natural that they should evince the deepest grief. 'We trusted,' said two of them to a stranger who asked the reason of their sadness, 'that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.' Their hopes had been dashed to the ground. Now the same Friend 'was parted from them,' yet 'they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple praising and blessing God.'

Here was a new note in the voice of the Temple. Would the sound already heard blend with it? Would a new song ascend from the Temple? Alas! this was not to be. The new hope which Jesus Christ brought to the Jewish Church and nation was not to be realized. The religious leaders were too blind to see the situation or the vision, too deaf to hear the voice of God in Christ. The voice of the Temple and the voice of the city did not blend with the voice of the Lord in one trinity of victory and joy. Our Lord's earlier lament over Jerusalem still held good: 'If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes.' A few short years passed. Darkness closed in on the city—a darkness perhaps worse than that which had veiled the Cross, and the most awful siege in the history of the world left Jerusalem in ruins and the Temple so obliterated that no man can trace its outline.

What is the voice of the Church to-day? Is there 'one clear call' from the Church? We are bound to confess that there is not. Too often there is a confused noise—the trumpet giving an uncertain sound, with consequent difficulty to the rank and file in preparing for the battle. Whether the voice of the people be the voice of God or not, the voice of the Church ought to be, but we cannot claim that it is. The outward semblance does not suffice. It will not do for the hands to be the hands of Esau if the voice is Jacob's. The Temple was situated at Jerusalem. The disciples had to

¹ L. D. Weatherhead, *His Life and Ours*, 320.

return there. They had to wait at Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. So to-day the Church is set right in the world, not retired from the world. It is there to influence the world, to bring the voice of the city into harmony with the voice of God. The Church must ever be on the watch lest it be affected by its environment, lest it take on the colour or the voice of the world. It must be in touch with its Lord and live a life of continual fellowship with Him, keeping an open mind and a teachable spirit. And it must make a constant effort to make the voice of the city harmonious with the voice of the Lord and harmonious in itself.

There is a work for us to do individually. Each of us has his own circle which he can influence, alike in the Church and in the city. It is no good for us to complain that things are not to our liking. Let us get into ever closer touch with our Ascended Lord, and let His joy fill our life. Then let us return with this new joy to our surroundings in the place where our lot is cast and bring into the voice of the Church a new note, which shall result in Church and city having a different and happier future than that of Jerusalem. Let us help to make a Holy City wherein dwelleth righteousness, Church and city alike singing the praises and echoing the song of Him who ascended on high, led captivity captive, and received gifts for men that the Lord God might dwell among them—they His people and He their God.

O Master, from the mountainside,
Make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
Among these restless throngs abide,
Oh, tread the city's streets again;
Till sons of men shall learn thy love,
And follow where thy feet have trod;
Till glorious from thy heaven above,
Shall come the City of our God.

The Motherhood of God

Is. lxvi. 13.—'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.'

1. THIS is a Scripture which falls on the ear like a benediction; whose promise is fulfilled in the very sound and spell of the words. But there is something unique in the saying in that

this is the only place in the Scriptures where God is directly compared to a mother. It declares that there is that in God which recalls that warm safety and sheltering love which first welcomed us into this rough world.

In all our thoughts of God we are compelled to content ourselves with the suggestion of a symbol. The philosopher who endeavours accurately to define God never gets beyond a series of negations; God is what we are not. But the humbler symbols of the Bible content the mind and carry a wealth of true suggestion. The genius of the prophets of Israel is splendidly seen in this direction. With the greatest of them the concept of God is never by definition, but by analogy and symbol, and it is interesting to note where they have gone for their symbols. Hosea's name for God is the Husband, who has loved Israel from the day of her espousals, and even through unfaithfulness loves her still. The scattered prophecies grouped together at the end of the Book of Isaiah give to God the name of Father, thereby approaching very nearly to Christ's own name, for here the term means more than the Fatherhood of a nation: 'Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham know us not.' But it is reserved for this last strange prophecy in the Book of Isaiah to rise to the conception of Motherhood.

It is interesting to notice that all these symbols denote relationship, and that they are all taken from family life. The fact that these great religious teachers have turned to the family to find a satisfactory symbol of God's relationship to man should serve to remind us afresh of the responsibilities of family life. What an irreparable loss it must be to the child to whom the idea of father only calls up the picture of a morose, unreasonable or cruel man! One of the easiest avenues to a true conception of God would seem to be blocked for that mind. What a tragedy if this tender saying should lose all attraction to some poor soul, because it was anything but comfort that it received as a child from its mother.

2. There is something in the love of woman which is different from the love of man; and it is in the love of a mother that the love of woman reaches its height. That also must be in the heart of God; and something corresponding to that must be in the quality of His love. Something like that we crave for also

when we turn in our weakness to God. This need Christ has satisfied in His revelation of the Father. For our Lord did more than teach men that God was their Father. By His words and by His life He showed them what God's Fatherhood meant to Him. In the story of the Prodigal Son we hear nothing of the mother, but the character of motherhood is there. How many of us must have felt that the way in which the father behaved in the Parable was rather unusual for a father, but exactly what we should expect a mother to do.

But it is in the way Jesus lived the life of sonship that we gain the clearest impression of how He conceived of His Father. Think of His love for little children, His tender friendship for His disciples, the constancy of His love for man, a love that did not die out when it was rejected and flung back with insult and open shame; and then remember that this sublime character was what it was because His spirit lay so uninterruptedly and so wholly open to God. Then there dawns upon our minds that in Jesus Christ the Motherhood of God as well as the Fatherhood of God stood revealed.

3. It was when Jesus was conceived as the only means of approach to a distant and offended God that there entered the real confusion which is responsible in the Roman Church for the introduction of Mary into the Godhead; the confusion which is responsible for the child's state of mind who said he hated God, but loved Jesus. And when in turn the traditional Christ obscured the Jesus of the Gospels, and He became a supernatural being without human sympathies; and especially when He was pictured chiefly as the dreadful Judge of the Last Assize, men feared Him as they had feared God, and Mary had to be brought in to intercede with her Son.

All hearts are touched and softened at her name;

And even as children, who have much offended
A too indulgent father, in great shame,
Penitent, and yet not daring unattended
To go into his presence, at the gate
Speak with their sister, and confiding wait
Till she goes in before and intercedes;
So men, repenting of their evil deeds,
And yet not venturing rashly to draw near
With their requests an angry Father's ear,

Offer to her their prayers and their confession,
And she for them in heaven makes intercession.¹

Much as we may condemn the inevitable confusion that arises through the introduction of Mary as a means of approach to God, surely we can recognize that it is due simply to a blundering endeavour to find in God a mother-heart. The prayers which devout Roman Catholics lift to Mary spring from something very deep and true in the human heart; and they are as likely to be heard as many a prayer which may be perhaps more accurately addressed; and we have no right to criticise such devotions unless we have something better and truer to suggest—unless we are able to assure our brethren in the Roman Catholic Church that the need they feel to be answered in Mary is completely met in God; that God feels towards us as a mother who comforteth her child.

¶ Ian Maclaren was once in a Roman Catholic Church in Italy. Before the altar to the Virgin knelt a woman, her lips moving devoutly in prayer, her eyes alight with wondering worship and love. As she was making her way to the door after her devotion Dr Watson asked her in Italian some questions about the points of interest in the building. The woman seemed pleased to find an English visitor who could converse in her own language, and they fell to talking about the scenery and the show places of the neighbourhood. By and by the conversation turned upon the difference between Roman Catholic and the Evangelical religion, especially in regard to the fact that Protestants do not address prayers to the Virgin. 'Don't you ever pray to the Mother of God?' she asked. 'No,' said Dr Watson, 'for it seems to me that all you find holy and helpful and adorable in the Virgin Mary, all that and infinitely more I find in her Divine Son.' 'Yes, sir,' she said wistfully, 'but you see you are a man and you don't know how a woman needs a woman to pray to.'

4. 'As one whom his *mother* comforteth.' Try to think how close to God that brings us. Here is a man weary and broken, out in the pitiless world. It matters, in one sense, comparatively little what has gone against him: his fortunes are ruined, his dearest have passed into darkness, his faith has given way beneath his feet, the net

¹ Longfellow.

of his own sins has caught him in some terrible entanglement. In such dark and anguished hours nothing is more pathetic than the way in which the heart longs to retreat to the mother that gave it being. There rises up the little corner of mother-earth, the fields in which he played as a merry boy, the old home, the little room, and the mother who came every night to see that all was right. What would he not give to be the happy, innocent boy again and feel her arms around him and her kiss upon his brow? And sometimes he does feel it. Sometimes there seems nothing left but to creep home like a wounded animal, and cast himself upon the mother-love from which he came at first. For this is the central heart of all his comfort: it is to no stranger he is coming; it is to the fountain of his being, and the very thought is comfort. And just this is the comfort the Divine Mother gives. We come to God in some distress of life, and the comfort is that we come to no stranger on whom we have no claim and who may turn in wonder and ask why we came. We come to the Eternal Mother—the source of our being—the ancient home to which we belong. The very thought that this is so is the first great comfort—merely to think of the mother-love of God is itself a consolation.

¶ That old Scottish mother of Barrie's, who had hardly ever set foot outside Kirriemuir, who knew nothing whatever of the great world of literature and culture in which her son lived, owed nothing in her hold upon him—in the utter rest and comfort that he found in her—to her knowledge or learning (though of course she had a great fund of native shrewdness), but almost exclusively to the mystic intimacy of the simple fact that she was his mother. Home to Barrie—as long as she lived—was always where his mother was.

Now follow this comfort a step further. To a woman with the true mother-heart, her child never really grows up; he is always the little child that was laid upon her breast. He may pass out and mingle with the world, may come to honour or disgrace—it matters nothing. Behind it all there moves in the mother's imagination the little form that clung to her hand, and knelt at her knee, and lisped her words, and ran to her for comfort. And it is the memory of all this that makes the mother-comfort in the after years. The grown man, broken with the battle of life or his own sins,

comes and casts himself once more at his mother's knee ; but it is not the grown man she sees. What does it matter what he is now ?—to her he is the child, weak, foolish, inexperienced, erring, but only the more therefore to be pitied and comforted. And thus to God we are never anything but little children ; He has a mother's pity on our weakness and folly and suffering. He makes allowance for us—His own heart pleads for us.

¶ We may recall Coventry Patmore's poem, 'The Toys.' The poet tells how he punished his little son for disobedience, 'His mother, who was patient, being dead' ; and how, fearing lest 'grief should hinder sleep,' he visited the child's bedside, only to find him sound asleep, his lashes wet with tears :

And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own ;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with
careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.

And that night the human father, touched to the soul, prayed to the Divine Father :

Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood,
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less

Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the
clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'

The poet says 'fatherly'—in reality it is more the *motherly* quality of compassion.

And, further, we are received without any questions asked. A mother, when her son flees to her in distress, does not really ask questions. Others may demand, not unnaturally, to know this or that before help is given ; but a mother's love asks nothing. It is enough to know that he is in distress—she may guess much and fear more, but the need for comfort comes first, and the knowledge can wait. There is something of this in the Motherhood of God. He will not probe the wound when He has power to heal it. There is surely something very tender and beautiful in this motherly comfort of God which asks no questions, demands no explanations, utters no reproach, but says simply, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' How easy it ought to make it to carry our sorrows to Him, just to know that 'as one whom his mother comforteth,' so God comforts us—with the same motherly tenderness and reticence, the same unwillingness to touch the wound or draw aside the veil from the hidden grief or shame !

She chides him not when he is down,
But gives him boldness by her gown :
Till twinkling eyes and merry lip
Say boldly, 'Now I cannot slip.'

So, when I fall, I closer cling
To one all-healing robe and wing :
For I believe the Son of Man
Loves more than any mother can.

ISAIAH AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

JOHN R. COATES

THE title of this appendix is certain to bring one and the same chapter to the mind of every reader. No Christian can think of the death of Jesus on the Cross save in terms of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Bishop Burnet writes as follows of the Earl of Rochester, who died after a wasted life in 1680: 'He said to me that, as he heard it [Is. liii.] read, he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his mind, and convince him, that he could resist it no longer: for the words had an authority, which did shoot like rays or beams, in his mind; so that he was convinced, not only by the reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his understanding, but by a power which did so effectually constrain him, that he did, ever after, as firmly believe in his Saviour, as if he had seen Him in the clouds.'

Such a statement sends the mind back across the centuries to a scene on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Behold, a man of Ethiopia was reading the prophet Isaiah: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, So he openeth not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away; His generation who shall declare? For his life is taken from the earth.' And the eunuch said, 'Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other?' And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus.

It is still profitable to ask the Ethiopian's question, and earlier pages of this volume will show how it may be answered from the standpoint of the historian. For our present purpose it is Philip's answer which is important, showing as it does that when Acts was written the Book of Isaiah was regarded as 'scripture,' and understood by Christians as referring to Jesus. Arthur Waley, in the preface to his new 'historical' translation of the *Tao Tê Ching*, admits that 'to know what a scripture meant to begin with is perhaps less important than to know what it means to-day.' However that may be, it is clearly necessary to know how the Early Church read the Old Testament, and the evidence at our disposal is overwhelmingly abundant. In the case of Isaiah the investiga-

tion is of special importance, both because of the extent of the material and because of its religious value.

The present brief enquiry may be divided into four parts as follows:—(I) The literary facts; (II) Some historical problems; (III) Predominant interests; (IV) The fulfilment of prophecy.

I

THE LITERARY FACTS

(1) *Statistics*.—It will be readily understood that it is impossible to give absolute figures; but it is worth while noting the results reached by various investigators. Thus Westcott and Hort, at the end of their edition of the New Testament, tabulate two hundred and sixty-one passages and phrases as being taken from Isaiah, and of these one hundred and one are found in Revelation and sixty-five in Pauline epistles. Concerning the latter an interesting observation is made by Strahan.¹ 'Certain spontaneous notes of appreciation from the lips and pen of St Paul are precious as indications, slight but real, of the impression made upon one master-spirit by the writings of another. "Isaiah crieth" (Rom. ix. 27) is an appraisement of the emphasis of his utterance; "well (or finely) spake the Holy Spirit through Isaiah" (Acts xxviii. 25) expresses hearty sympathy with the prophet's teaching and admiration of the language in which it is conveyed; and "Isaiah is very bold" (Rom. x. 20) is one spiritual protagonist's tribute to another's personal courage.'

Swete reduces the numbers given above by confining himself to 'direct citations' and disregarding 'mere allusions and reminiscences.' 'Thus upon a rough estimate the passages directly quoted from the Old Testament by writers of the New Testament are one hundred and sixty. Of these fifty-one belong to the Pentateuch, forty-six to the Poetical books, and sixty-one to the Prophets. Among single books the Psalter supplies forty and Isaiah thirty-eight.' Of the last named, twenty-four are in

¹ *The Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, i. 621.

Pauline epistles. Revelation, he points out, 'does not quote, but its language is full of Old Testament phraseology to an extent unparalleled in the other books.' If we take into view the fact that some passages are quoted more than once, we get forty-one as the number of direct citations of Isaiah by Paul, according to Swete, and it is significant that of these fifteen come from Is. i.-xxxix., and twenty-six from chaps. xl.-lxvi.

The figures go up again when we turn to Dittmar. Thus, in his exhaustive lists of parallels, the total number of New Testament references for Isaiah is one thousand five hundred and thirty five, of which twelve hundred and sixty are of the nature of allusions and reminiscences, one hundred and eighty-five 'quotations in the wider sense,' and ninety 'quotations in the narrower sense.' Taking the last two classes together, we find that, according to this writer Revelation has forty-five, Paul ninety-five, and Matthew thirty. Measuring by pages, and including references to Old Testament, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, as well as New Testament, Isaiah has ten pages, the Pentateuch twenty, and Psalms eight and a half.

(2) *Usage*.—On the linguistic side, Woods is particularly useful, illustrating from Isaiah and elsewhere the fact that New Testament writers employ many methods in their use of Old Testament. (a) Quotations are usually from LXX. (b) Some show independent translation from the Hebrew. (c) One is in Aramaic, namely, Matt. xxvii. 46, Mark. xv. 34. (d) A few seem to come from the Aramaic Targum. (e) Departures from LXX. are sometimes due to slips of memory, errors of transcription, literary corrections, or exegetical alterations. (f) Different quotations are often mixed together, e.g., Is. viii. 14 and xxviii. 16, in both Rom. ix. 33 and 1 Pet. ii. 6-8. (g) In some cases the Old Testament is paraphrased. (h) Occasionally one New Testament writer uses another's quotation. For examples the reader must be referred to Woods and Swete.

Burton groups the material in four classes, namely: (a) Argumentative quotations; (b) Quotations made the basis of comment; (c) Quotations of comparison or of transferred application; (d) Literary influence. He contrasts the method of Matthew with that of Jesus Himself, who 'quotes the Old Testament almost exclusively for its moral and religious teaching.' Against

this may be set the judgment of J. A. Findlay.¹ 'Matt. iv. 15 f. is a magnificently chosen testimony, and there is no need to praise the choice of the two passages chosen from the Servant-songs (Matt. viii. 17; xii. 18 ff.). It should be noticed that their selection is the Evangelist's doing. . . . Between them they give us the best character-sketch of Jesus outside 1 Cor. xiii.' For our Lord's own use of Scripture, reference may be made to the present writer's *The Coming of the Church*, p. 25 ff., where it is shown to have been historical, critical, and devotional. It is generally held that His experience at the Baptism, and His agony in Gethsemane were partly conditioned by His familiarity with the Servant passages in Isaiah, and reasons will be adduced below for believing that He found inspiration in the earlier chapters of the same book.

II

SOME HISTORICAL PROBLEMS

It will be generally agreed, as M'Quat urges, that 'no theory with regard to the actual authorship of any part of [Isaiah] can claim to be supported by the manner of the references.' On the other hand, the study of our subject throws valuable light on the history of the LXX, and also on that of the original text of the Old Testament. In the case of Isaiah, the former may be illustrated by Matt. xii. 18, and the latter by Rom. ix. 33.

Many modern writers think that a literary link between the Old Testament and the New Testament is to be found in early Christian 'Testimonies,' i.e. collections of passages from the Old Testament for use in discussion with Jews, and that this explains the fact that different New Testament writers combine the same quotations. It is probable that such collections had previously been made by the Jews. As Hatch wrote in 1888,² 'A race . . . which was carrying on an active propaganda, would have . . . manuals . . . of controversy. It may also be supposed, if we take into consideration the contemporary habit of making collections of *excerpta* . . . that some of these manuals would consist of extracts from the Old Testament. The existence of composite quotations

¹ *Amicitiae Corolla*, ed. H. G. Wood, p. 704 f.

² *Essays in Biblical Greek*, p. 203.

in the New Testament, and in some of the early Fathers suggests the hypothesis that we have in them relics of such manuals.' Those who, like Rendel Harris, have pursued this line of enquiry, have shown the important part played by Isaiah at the beginning of the Christian era. According to Hatch,¹ 'Philo appears to quote Isaiah only twice.' It was not the philosophers, but the apocalyptic enthusiasts, who made use of this armoury.

Paul's love of Isaiah has already been indicated. The fact that in Romans the quotations from Isaiah do not agree with LXX, whereas those from the Pentateuch and Psalms do, might suggest that the former were from memory (so Woods), or that they came from a collection of prophetic extracts in Hebrew or Aramaic. In any case, we may well believe that 2 Tim. iv. 13, is part of a letter written when the Apostle was composing Romans, and that Isaiah, complete or in extracts, was among the parchments or books which he had left with Carpus at Troas.

III

PREDOMINANT INTERESTS

Study of the use of Isaiah in the New Testament sheds valuable light on the faith and hope of the early Christians and points to the following as their predominant interests.

(1) As Moffatt says,² 'their earliest theoretic interest was the demonstration from Old Testament prophecies that Jesus was the true Messiah.' The references are familiar, and need not be given here. Rendel Harris and others think that Is. xl. 3 should be included here, as having been applied in the 'Testimonies' to Jesus, though the Evangelists transfer it to John.

(2) Similarly the idea of the Kingdom of God is expressed in Isaianic terms. Indeed it might be said that, from the literary point of view, Isaiah is the father of Christian apocalyptic, his influence in this sphere being more fundamental than that of Ezekiel or Daniel.

(3) The dignity of the Church, as set forth for example in 1 Pet. ii. 9, is conceived along the lines laid down in Is. xl.-lv.

(4) The symbolic and historic importance of

Jerusalem to the first generation of Christians is a heritage from Isaiah, as is shown, for example, by the references in Revelation.

(5) The Passion of our Lord is interpreted in terms of the Suffering Servant, as noted above.

(6) Of special significance is the association of passages from Isaiah and elsewhere with events in the life of Jesus. It is difficult not to believe that this practice was inspired by the habit of the Master, who seems to have found guidance and comfort for Himself in the study of Isaiah. See, for example, Mark iv. 12, and compare the parallel in Acts xxviii. 25 ff.

(7) The supreme place of worship in the primitive Church is well exhibited in A. B. Macdonald's recent book on the subject. 'In New Testament times,' he writes, 'knowledge of Scripture must have been derived principally from its use in Worship.' This applies not only to readings and expositions, but also to the use of hymns. One specimen of the last, in Luke ii. 29-32, well illustrates the value of Isaiah in this connection.

(8) Closely related to the preceding is the concern for world-redemption, which constantly expresses itself in words that echo the evangelical prophet.

IV

THE FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is reported to have said that He came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. This is to be understood not of the letter but of the spirit. Our Lord's frequent mention of the ministry and sufferings of the Prophets, and the way in which He connects their words with His own activity, show that we must regard Him as being perfectly what the prophet of old was to a limited degree. The best illustration of this is seen in a comparison of Jesus with Isaiah the son of Amoz, the Judean prophet who lived in the last half of the eighth century B.C.

(1) The drawing of historical parallels is proverbially dangerous, but it is obvious that certain features of the background are similar for Jesus and for His forerunner seven hundred years before. In many ways Rome was to the beginning of the Christian era what Assyria had been to the age of Hezekiah. In Israel men were divided into parties according to the attitude which they adopted towards the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

² *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, 22.

dominant world-power, and in their respective periods Isaiah and Jesus were distinguished by their aloofness from these, while at the same time their message pointed to a Divine solution of the political problem. It is also obvious that both denounced the same kind of social sins and religious failings.

(2) When we compare the doctrine of the two great teachers, we find a similarity that goes far and deep. Five outstanding features may be noted. (a) The conception of *God as Father* is fundamental with both. This is not always noticed in the case of Isaiah. And yet his Book opens with the cry of the broken-hearted Father: 'My own sons, whom I nourished and brought up, have rebelled against me.' (b) The Kingdom, or *Kingship of God*, as apprehended by Isaiah, or rather as apprehending him, has a vividness and immediacy only surpassed in the experience of Jesus Himself. When we hear Jesus say 'The Kingdom of God is at hand,' we get the clue to Isaiah's challenging of Ahaz; and the political formulation of Isaiah's hope and faith helps us to understand the expectation of our Lord. In this connection it might even be suggested that the promise to the disciples, recorded separately by Matthew and Luke, that they should sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, is an announcement of the impending fulfilment of the Divine offer given in the first chapter of Isaiah: 'I will restore thy judges as at the first.' However that may be, the man who said, 'Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,' is clearly of the spirit of Him who came into Galilee saying, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand: repent.' (c) The doctrine of the *Remnant* is recognized by all as one of Isaiah's leading ideas, and it evidently had a prominent place in the mind of Christ. (d) Closely connected with this, in both cases, is the looking for a new *Jerusalem*, to be established after the destruction of the old, which nothing could avert. Isaiah's attitude towards the Holy City becomes comprehensible in the light of the teaching of Jesus. (e) The *forgiveness of sin* is for both the indispensable Divine miracle, conditioned by repentance. But here Isaiah is impotent while Jesus has power, and it is as fruitful to study the difference as the likeness. We cannot forget those seven hundred dividing years. And there is only one Jesus.

(3) Although the time occupied by the ministry of Isaiah is so much longer, it resembles

that of our Lord in the way in which it moves through three stages, which may be called broadly, Public—Private—Public. In each case failure with the crowd leads to intensive work among disciples, and then at the end there is the tragic appeal to Jerusalem. It is probable that Isaiah, following Amos and Hosea, did his first preaching in the North, as indicated in the ninth chapter and the beginning of chapter twenty-eight, and it is interesting to think that his first disciples may have come from there.

Professor T. W. Manson has shown that the words of Jesus fall into three groups, corresponding to three types of hearer, namely—general public, enemies, disciples. A striking parallel to this is found in the suggestion that what may be called the Messianic passages in Isaiah represent his teaching in the inner circle of his disciples, so that it could be said of him, as it was of Jesus, that whereas he spoke to the people in parables, 'privately to his own disciples he expounded all things.' The terms in which they addressed their enemies are also remarkably similar, specially in those utterances beginning with the word 'Woe,' in which judgment is strangely mingled with sympathy.

Dr Manson also draws attention to the importance for Jesus of the confession of Peter, calling it 'the watershed of the gospel history.' He equates it with the recognition of the Kingdom of God, and regards the subsequent ministry of Jesus as 'the consolidation of the Remnant.' In other words, he takes the same view of it as that which appears in the additional words of the narrative in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church,' etc. He follows the majority of modern commentators in not regarding this as a genuine utterance of Jesus. I used to think that its authenticity could be defended along the line of the reference to a Rabbinic illustration of a passage in Numbers given by Dr Chase in an appendix to his article on the First Epistle of Peter in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*. But a comparison of the whole passage with the twenty-eighth chapter of Isaiah throws new light on the matter. In fact each passage illumines the other. I would suggest that Jesus was referring to the very words which in the First Epistle of Peter are applied to Himself: 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, . . . he that believeth shall not be put to shame.' The

reference to the gates of Hades can be explained from the context in Isaiah as indicating 'the scornful men that rule this people,' while the words about the keys are naturally connected with the twenty-second chapter of Isaiah. It may be reasonably suggested that the words in Isaiah are his response, or God's response through him, to an expression of faith on the part of a disciple. Was that disciple Hezekiah?

Light also seems to be thrown both ways when we turn to the question of 'signs.' Jesus refused to have anything to do with the sort of signs which the Jews desired, and said that a prophet was the real sign. With this in mind, we are able to trace a clear line of thought in the seventh and eighth chapters of Isaiah, and to offer a new solution of the much-discussed 'Immanuel' problem. In the discussion between Ahaz and the prophet, the latter says 'Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God, from Hades or from heaven.' This is usually taken as meaning that Isaiah was prepared to give a miraculous sign. But it is better to take it as his challenge to the king to produce his credentials for his own policy of alliance with a great power. When this is declined, Isaiah utters the great words concerning the bearing of the son whose name is 'Immanuel.' The latter, he says, is actually being born at that time. He means himself and his disciples, whose personal experience of the Kingship of God is such that they can say, 'God is with us.' Like Jesus, he has no sign of the sensational external sort. If he is asked for one, all he can say is, 'Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.' He knew in his day that the Kingdom of God breaks into this world in the soul of the prophet and in those who understand him. They themselves are the miracles. Paul meant the same thing when he said that, 'God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame the things that are strong.' All this is vitally bound up with what may truly be called the pacifism of Isaiah. He believed in the feasibility of a policy of faith. Turning back to the Gospel, we see a new meaning in the application of the name 'Immanuel' to Jesus.

(4) Bishop Gore wrote of Jesus as the last and greatest of the Prophets of Israel; and if by this is meant no more than one who declares the will of God, this might well seem an inadequate

description. But there is abundant reason to believe that the prophet felt himself to be the very agent of God, not only proclaiming but actually offering the rule of God to his hearers. What we call his 'symbolic' actions constituted the initiation of the Divine working in the world. While on the side of 'the dark backward and abysm of time' this is undoubtedly related to the magic of the primitive, on the other side it goes forward to the life-giving Incarnation of God in Jesus. It might even be claimed that the prophet's consciousness was 'Messianic.' Jeremiah speaks of himself as God's viceroy, in the account of his call to the prophetic ministry, and Isaiah's appropriation of the name 'Immanuel' seems to suggest that he regarded himself as fulfilling an ancient hope. In fact it would seem that to himself the Hebrew prophet was more a fulfiller than a predictor, a doer rather than a speaker.

In this connection it is significant that Isaiah adopts the attitude of a physician towards his people. This is clearly indicated in the first chapter of his book, where the medical metaphor should be extended from the opening verses to cover the whole chapter. Thus we have in verses 5-9 the symptoms; 10-15 the diagnosis; 16, 17 the prescription; 18-27 the treatment. It is noteworthy—whatever it may signify—that these correspond exactly, as to form, and partly as to content, to the Four Noble Truths of Buddha. But what interests us still more is that Jesus sees His work in the same light. And further, both Isaiah and Jesus were noted for their skill in healing the sick.

Finally it may be pointed out that when Jesus first expressed His agony, He did it in the words of Isaiah, 'This people's heart is waxed gross,' and we can well believe the tradition that this great forerunner died the death of a martyr.

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